

**Minutes of a meeting of the Blaby North Community Forum held at
Braunstone Civic Centre on Wednesday 8 October 2008**

Present

Cllr G. Sanders (Blaby District Council) - in the Chair

Cllr. J. Bell	Blaby District Council
Cllr. J. Hudson	Blaby District Council
Cllr. E. Webster-Williams	Blaby District Council
Mr. R. Berrington	Braunstone Town Council
Ms. N. Blight	Braunstone Town Council
Mr. P. Fox	Braunstone Town Council
Mrs J. Fox	Braunstone Town Council
Mr. R. Harris	Braunstone Town Council
Mr. N. J. Brown CC	Braunstone Town and Leicestershire County Councils
Mr. J. Dodd	Braunstone Town Mini-bus Project
Mr. R. Meadows	Braunstone Town Mini-bus Project
Mr. N. Cox	Glenfield Parish Council
Ms. B. Mitchinson	Leicester Forest East Parish Council
Mr. A. Robotham	Local resident
Mrs B. Robotham	Local resident

Officers and representatives of Partner Organisations

Blaby District Council

Mr. G. Clark	Planning Policy Manager
Mr. J. Holden	Deputy Chief Executive
Mr. J. Leach	Head of Community and Neighbourhood Planning
Mr. P. Tebbitt	Senior Planning Officer

Leicestershire County Council

Ms. K. Ball	Community Engagement Manager
Ms. J. Bailey	Committee Officer
Mr. A. Brown	Team Leader, Performance and Improvement
Ms. S. Davies	Policy Officer
Mr. T. Kirk	Group Manager, Passenger Transport Unit
Ms. H. Murray	Blaby Library Service

Voluntary Action, Blaby District

Mr. A. Ingles	Chief Executive
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31. Introductions and apologies

Cllr. Sanders welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were reported on behalf of the following people - Cllr. E. Parsons, Cllr. J. Dolby, Cllr. D. Clements, Cllr. J. Springthorpe, and Cllr. R. Ward (Blaby District Council), Cllr. R.S. Dixon (Blaby District and Braunstone Town Councils), Mrs. J. Dickinson CC (Blaby District and Leicestershire County Councils), and Mr. D. R. Parsons CC (Leicestershire County Council).

32. Declarations of interest

The Chairman invited members to make any declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda. None were made.

33. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2008 were confirmed as a correct record.

34. Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising which were not covered elsewhere on the agenda for the meeting.

Reports and Feedback requested by Service Providers35. Activities for Young People - update and feedback

Kristy Ball advised that she and Tony Robotham had been working on this issue, particularly with regard to arts and crafts activities for young people, which had been at the top of the list of requests. They were checking availability of locations, youth workers, and transport and had drafted letters asking for support and funding. It was hoped that proposals would be finalised by the time Community Forums received their first injection of funding in January 2009; Blaby North was ahead of other Forums in this respect.

The Forum noted that it was estimated that £800 would be needed for the arts and crafts activities, to undertake a pilot for a series of events. Members indicated that they wished to express their support there and then so that the project could go ahead as soon as funds were available.

Kristy thanked everyone who had joined in the workshop at the previous meeting and helped to move the idea forward. She added that a report would go to 'Blaby Together' (the District Local Strategic Partnership [LSP]) shortly to agree details about the process of funding.

Members commented on the excellent contribution made by the young people who had attended the Forum in June, and hoped that they would be able to come to future meetings.

Funding for Community Forums

Leicestershire Together (the County-wide LSP) had agreed that each Forum would be receiving £20,000 over the next three years (2008-11).

Arising from the discussion above, Kristy explained that the decision-making process for allocating money to groups and projects would be considered by Blaby Together, before the Community Forums received the funding - it was obviously important to ensure equity and parity across the areas in question, and the County as a whole.

AGREED:

That the Forum supports the proposals for a arts and crafts activities for young people in Blaby North, and the allocation of around £800 for the project accordingly should funding become available.

36. Local Development Framework - update and feedback

Gary Clark and Paul Tebbitt gave a presentation on progress with the Blaby Local Development Framework (LDF), and circulated some maps at the meeting showing areas for possible development. Copies of the maps are filed with these minutes.

Gary explained the national and regional context of the LDF, which could be seen as the 'spatial element' of the Sustainable Community Strategy. It was not a single Plan, rather a collection of documents that would be prioritised and updated by Blaby District Council over time.

The Forum noted that housing was concentrated around existing urban areas in both the current and emerging Regional Plans. Gary advised a 'Sustainable Urban Extension' (SUE) to the west of Leicester was favoured in the emerging Regional Plan as an option for development, but further data on infrastructure and transport was needed before any decisions were made.

The following points and comments were made during discussions -

Role of Blaby District Council

Members asked to what extent the District Council could truly be said to be able to shape the future of the area, as it would be unable to contravene Regional Plan policies in the Regional Plan.

It was commented that Blaby could in fact be divided into two distinct areas - urban and rural - each with rather different needs.

Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE)

It was commented that proposals for an SUE already appeared quite site-specific - did this indicate that EMRA (the East Midlands Regional Assembly) was likely to impose its preference on the District?

Gary outlined the role of EMRA, a regional body on which local authority Councillors and other organisations were represented. He said that Blaby District Council had argued strongly that it should be

responsible for identifying sites for an SUE and similar development and this had been accepted by the Examination Panel and the Secretary of State.

Responding to questions, Gary said that it was intended that the SUE would differ from previous developments, eg. Thorpe Astley, in its emphasis on sustainability. It would nonetheless represent a major greenfield development. The 3 possible areas indicated on the maps had been identified through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Study after around 140 sites were initially considered. Paul said that one site was largely owned by a single party, but that the areas identified did not necessarily correspond to the boundaries of land ownership.

The Forum considered the map of strategic employment sites, noting that further sites might yet be added.

What information was used to develop the LDF?

Paul and Gary gave examples of the evidence used to develop LDF policies. These included urban capacity and strategic land availability studies, general studies done by the local authority such as Landscape Character Assessment, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, renewable energy, biodiversity studies, and Planning Policy Statements. Factors such as land availability and developers' comments were also taken into account.

Gary outlined the timetable for the approval of the LDF by Blaby District Council and encouraged people to come along to the public exhibitions in November and December.

AGREED:

That progress with the LDF be noted.

37. Influencing the Big Budget

Andy Brown invited everyone to take part in a voting exercise relating to the priorities of Leicestershire Together to inform the budget-setting process. He explained that Leicestershire Together had agreed its priorities through the Sustainable Community Strategy (which Forums had been consulted on), but it did have opportunities to increase spending in certain areas, and wanted to know more about people's views. Voting results from all Community Forums would be reported to Leicestershire Together and to the Forums.

Items requested by Forum Members

38. Community Transport

Andrew Ingles outlined the work of Voluntary Action Blaby, with particular reference to community transport. He explained that Voluntary Action's core activities centred on volunteering and community development, supporting other organisations and advising community groups. He instanced activities supported by Voluntary Action such as mental health support groups, a community garden, and support for carers.

Andrew referred to Blaby District Council's Community Grants scheme which gave grants of up to £200 per annum, and 'Grassroots Grants' (run by VAL and the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Community Foundation) which could award funding of up to £5,000 over a 3-year period for community groups with a turnover of less than £20,000 per annum. He encouraged people to apply to these schemes.

The Forum noted the range of community transport that could be accessed through Voluntary Action, for example -

Social car scheme

This was for people without access to public transport, or who had difficulty using it. Anyone could contact the scheme to refer someone in need or to register themselves. Volunteers used their own cars to take people to and from their destinations, eg. shopping, visits to friends, dentist appointments, etc. Clients paid a small charge based on the distance travelled, and could use bus passes or vouchers issued by the County Council for this.

Minibuses

Voluntary Action Blaby would soon take delivery of a new minibus, made possible by a County Council grant. Funding to run the vehicle for community activities would be sought, but it would also be available for hire, at relatively low cost. There were also two minibuses available through Braunstone Town Council, and Commbus, based in Narborough, had one minibus.

Andrew commented that the above schemes meant that there was a fairly good level of community transport during the daytime, although it was heavily used and more volunteer drivers were always needed. However for young people - who often wanted to travel in the evenings - there was less on offer.

39. Local Transport

Tony Kirk spoke about work being done by the County Council on its Local Transport Plan (LTP), which set out a transport strategy for Leicestershire. Copies of the recently revised bus map of the County were circulated at the meeting.

Tony explained that the LTP contained an 'Accessibility Strategy', about *geographical* accessibility to transport. The County Council aimed to ensure that 95% of Leicestershire residents had an hourly, or better, daytime bus service within in 13 minute (800m) walk. He also referred to other transport options such as taxi-buses, which could help to provide more flexible cover for the other 5% of residents, mainly in rural areas.

Tony responded to the following points and questions raised by the Forum -

- Why did buses no longer run to Thorpe Astley on Sundays and evenings?

It had been decided that the services were not commercially viable. The County Council was reviewing all its contracted services for evenings and Sundays, as there was a limited amount of funding available and the focus was on support for evening services which reflected high frequency daytime provision.

- When would the results of that review be known?

Reports would be submitted to the County Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee inviting comments early in 2009.

- How much funding was available to support local bus services?

The County Council spent just over £4 million gross per annum for local buses. The average cost per passenger for supported services was under £1, although some rural routes were more expensive to subsidise.

- Who was the County Council Cabinet Member responsible for local transport?

Mr. Nick Rushton CC

- Was funding to support local bus services increased each year?

The County Council, like all local authorities, had to make efficiency savings - as a result of which the budget was actually falling in real terms. However, the focus was on achieving the same or better service delivery with less money; by reviewing existing contracts, routes, vehicle loading, and so on.

- Were County Council fleet vehicles available for use in the evenings?

There were five 70-seater yellow buses, a number of accessible minibuses, and one multi-purpose vehicle (mpv) available for hire.

- Buses in Glenfield used only the main roads - residents in the rest of the village who were elderly or could not walk far found it difficult to use them.

It was suggested that this was because Glenfield was now serviced by the main bus companies which used larger vehicles, making it easiest for them to use main roads. Tony said that it nonetheless satisfied the criteria for hourly services, and suggested that other community transport could assist less able people in these circumstances.

Andrew Ingles mentioned a door-to-door service to Fosse Park, noting that there were usually plenty of spaces.

- When would funding for 2009/10 be confirmed? Knowing this would help groups to plan ahead.

A review of Voluntary Sector funding was currently taking place, to ensure that funding was allocated on a fair and equitable basis across the County. Tony suggested that the levels of funding for community transport would probably remain at a similar level in 2009/10.

40. Question Time

'Teen Courts'

Tony Robotham asked if there had been any progress with suggestions for a 'Teen Courts' which had been discussed by the Forum in June in the context of addressing anti-social behaviour (minute 25 refers).

Kristy replied that this was being followed up, and Damien Nickerson (Community Safety Officer) hoped to report back to the next meeting.

41. Items for future Forum meetings

No specific items were suggested at the meeting, although it was suggested that fewer presentations and more general debate would be useful.

42. Date and venue of the next Forum meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place in Glenfield, subject to a suitable venue being available.

NOTED:

That the next meeting of the Forum would take place on Monday 2 February 2009, starting at 7.00pm; the venue to be confirmed.