

**Minutes of the Public Meeting
Castlefields Residents' Association
and
Newport Road Area Residents' Association**

Date: 24th January 2024, 19:00 – 20:30, Stafford Castle Golf Club
Attendees: Residents of Castlefields and Newport Road Area, Guest Speakers (see Agenda) and County Councillors Carolyn Trowbridge and Mark Winnington

Agenda

1	Welcome	Lorna Green, Mike Court
2	Local Police matters of interest/concern	Chief Inspector Giles Parsons -Local Policing Commander for Stafford borough
3	Stafford Town Centre proposals and other local developments	Stafford Borough Councillor Rob Kenney, Town Centre Tsar Aidan Godfrey – Leader of SBC
4	Insights from our local councillor	Stafford Borough Councillor, Doug Rouxel
5	Castlefields Pond	Victoria Door, Mike Court
6	Any other business	All

Minutes

1 Welcome

MC welcomed all to the meeting. The two associations are pleased to be working together as we have shared concerns and interests.

2 Local Police matters of interest/concern

Chief Inspector Giles Parsons:

Pleased to see so many people here. Wants to listen to our concerns. Been at Stafford borough for 4 years. Introduced Scott who is one of our local PCSOs and gave the names of a number of other PCSOs who look after this area. PCSOs do most of the engagement with local communities. Castlefields and Newport Road are reasonably low crime areas, this is based on what the police is told. Based on figures in last 6 months, 9 anti-social incidences and 39 crimes, the majority of which are domestic abuse. Work in partnership with a

number of partners, weekly multi-agency meeting to tackle issues related to domestic abuse. Another priority is drugs, organized crime groups and exploitation of vulnerable people. Keen to get information from communities, as this can be used by the police to address crime. Asked that we give that information (phone number is 101, there is an online option for non-emergencies).

Neighbourhood Watch has changed to SmartAlert. If you register your postcode online the police will keep you up to date about crime in your area. Used by PCSOs to spread information to local community. Scott had leaflets for people, which were distributed to the attendees at the end of the meeting.

Stafford town centre – done a lot of work in last few months re anti-social behaviour and increased visibility with patrolling officers on foot and PCSOs. 84% increase in stop and search incidences.

Road safety – CRA has set up a speedwatch group and police happy to work with us on that. Again information on speeding hotspots is useful information for the police.

Questions from the floor:

Q – What is being done about graffiti?

A - Scott – just had a clean-up around Stafford town. PCSOs aware it is a problem and addressing it.

Q – Cyclists going through town centre

A – Breach of public space protection order. Lots of fines issued this year.

Q – Burleyfields – road through estate – people speed through the estate, no give way white lines.

Cllr CT Taylor Wimpey has been asked to add speed humps to slow down traffic. Mike – Think about setting up a Burleyfields residents' association separate from CRA to address such issues. DR also working regularly with Taylor Wimpey to engage with Burleyfields issues.

Q- Train station car park –Skateboarders are a danger to selves and other.

A - Scott advised CCTV used and some skateboarders already identified.

Q - Traffic lights at bottom of west way – red light ignored by traffic. Been going on for 2-3 years.

A- Scott advised that this is a common problem with other traffic lights in Stafford. If registration numbers reported happy to call on these people.

3. Stafford Town Centre proposals and other local developments

Stafford Borough Councillor Rob Kenney, Town Centre Tsar and Aidan Godfrey, Leader of SBC:

MC advised we want to build a good working relationship with the council. We do not have a parish council representing us so not got that formal relationship.

RK - cannot go into massive detail as still in confidential sessions. Rough update – station approach – will be started March 2024, tidying up front area and expand drop-off and pick-up area. Highway works will be minimal, most disruptive work will be done in evenings. The co-op building – finishing the conveyancing, next will be design, demolition and procurement, all governed by the value it brings the community. No final plans as yet. Will listen to members of the public. Commercial ground floor and top floor residential, will have parking provision. Guildhall – in process of exchanging contracts and then work will start – demolish empty units at back. Front will be kept. Will then be looking for partners to work with on future plans. Will take several years but is a start to the change of the town centre. There will be a master plan and a traffic plan. Government money being used to buy the co-op, not local council tax money.

AG – Gateway development. Project Stafford incorporates all the individual projects, including Gateway. £20 million of the levelling up fund has been allocated. The first £20 million will be spent on decontaminating the land. Takes the pressure off developers, who can come in and start building retail, leisure and housing. Railway station will have a western access. Waiting for interest from private developers. Will take on board feedback from the public. Needs our help with feedback.

MC. Re Gateway – NRRRA did a lot of work responding to the consultation and were disappointed that the cabinet passed it without seeming to take notice of these responses. There is much strength of feeling around the plans. For example, the RAs have now formed Friends of Castlefields Pond in response to plans for Lakeside.

AG. We should not have had our criticisms dismissed. Now it is not the same cabinet – a different administration. Wants to know from us what we want. How can we improve the plan. Cllr T said all our comments were reviewed and Michelle Smith who led the project, said that every comment would be responded to. The plan is a vision, that is all.

Questions from the floor:

Q - the word 'residential' – does not seem that the rest of the infrastructure is going to be matched with the local services.

A- AG- section 106 order – where a developer makes a contribution to the local area. Will negotiate with developers to get this sorted.

Q- Several people asked about the terrible state of our hospital and lack of 24 hour A&E.

A – AG- It is not under the Borough – we need to talk to our MP.

Q -Sorting Office, what is happening?

A – AG no developer has come along with specific plans for the area so nothing yet agreed.

MC– understands that the Post Office does not want to sell that land.

Q – will the co-op have parking for the residential element.

A - AG - Yes – may need to look at the town centre traffic layout.

Q - how will the various council bodies communicate as currently it is fragmented.

A - If a developer plan does not fit in with what we want we will not do it.

Q - Is there provision for green spaces in the plans for the town centre as it would be attractive for those who are going to live there

A - RK – difficult to create green spaces in the centre. Possibility of adding some trees.

Q – Why are we looking to increase residential properties when local industries have reduced.

A - RK– if we don't have residential as part of these developments no one would come forward to develop. It is part of the government funding.

AG– Government tells us how much to build. Developers want to build 4-5 bedroom houses, but we need affordable houses, (80% of the average house price in the area). Our priority is to develop council housing.

Q – What powers do you have about empty units in the town.

A - RK– none. But there is a scheme re rates and empty properties. Business rates will be doubled for empty buildings. We cannot currently demand a building is put right. A law changes later this year should help here.

Q – Any timescale to take on developers for the gateway?

A - AG – We are waiting for them now. Need to make the land useable. Have to spend the £20m by March 2025, so will go from there.

Q – Is flooding being addressed?

A - AG – Lots of different reasons for flooding in Stafford e.g. Victorian water works; when the water goes away to the main river Trent the amount of silt is high and bounces the water back as river not been dredged. MC. We can use a strong RA to talk to the council to find out what is going on.

BK – River Sow last dredged in 1967.

Q - Cllr T & Cllr W– will the old entrance to the Guildhall and the frontage be kept?

A - AG. yes, as part of the listed building. Plans going in for a new school in Burleyfields. There is a Bod and a Sainsburys going into Burleyfields. Both appealed to us to keep raising our issues. Want to see as much of old Stafford restored/kept.

Q – Potential for grass and bee-hives etc. for roofs in centre?

A- AG– We are being guided through being a bee-friendly area. Cllr T. The Borough has started looking at green roofs.

DR. Developers have to show 10% net gain in biodiversity. He will be pressing for the 10% on co-op and Guildhall and for that 10% to be in the town centre.

MC suggested a green corridor through from Victoria Park to town centre.

MC. When Borough Council does a formal consultation – we don't have a part in that process because we are not a parish council. But we are active RAs and would like our council to recognise that and engage with us.

4 Insights from our local Stafford Borough Councillor, Doug Rouxel

DR so pleased to be here and proud to be part of a community that wants to improve itself. He covered the following:

Students from the college parking in residential areas, following the loss of the waste ground.

Action: CllrR to discuss concerns with college but needs evidence that it is students.

Questions from the floor:

Q - HGVs bringing mud to Martin Drive from Burleyfields.

A – Cllr R has already raised this issue with Taylor Wimpey. A resident pointed out that TW used to have regular road cleaning but he has not seen that for at least a year. Cllr T says it is in the application that there will be wheel wash on the sites. It may be coming from the new David Wilson and Persimmon sites.

Action: Cllr R to look into this.

Q - Lighting on track between Castlefields and Castle street – lights have been out for quite a while.

Action: Cllr W to look into this.

Cllr R does monthly surgeries in Kings Horse, per his newsletter. Will review frequency after the February surgery.

5 Castlefields Pond

MC. Update on the two RAs which are working together to re-shape part of the Gateway plan called 'Lakeside'. Over 30 people came to a meeting in November leading to a list of actions, vision statement, the creation of a Friends of the Castlefields Pond group with its own website. We got people to tell us why it is of value to them and we used this to complete an application for the Pond as an asset of community value. It was submitted to the BC and awaits a response by 14th February. It shows that a number of people care for the pond and want to keep it. This will be there when there is planning in the future. This the two RAs working together. We want to meet again in the near future and we need people to support us to enable us to end up with what we want. There are things to be done and we need help.

Action: RA secretaries to send out email with date for this meeting.

6 Any other business

Q - Gateway density, and is the £20m linked to the 900 residences. MC advised that AG had said there would be another consultation, so this is our opportunity to give clarity to some of the concerns we have. We need to have our vision, being negative will not get us anywhere. Cllr T said when we can make a difference is when a plan comes in and we can work through Cllr R to make a difference via the planning process. MC – in advance of that let us do our thinking now and share our thoughts with the Borough Council.

We need conversations with our local MP to make her aware of what is going on and look to get her to attend one of our meetings. Also invite health reps

CRA Chair LG thanked everyone for attending and the NRARA Chair and the guest speakers. Provisional time for next meeting end of April.