

SEFTON AREA PARTNERSHIP OF LOCAL Councils
Aintree Village-Formby-Hightown-Ince Blundell-Little Altcar
Lydiate-Maghull-Melling-Sefton-Thornton

Minutes of the Meeting of the Area Partnership held on Thursday 28th January, 2016 at Maghull Town Hall

PRESENT:

Cllrs G.Lee (Chair, Melling), J.Colbert (Aintree Village), P.Gill (Aintree Village), M.Coles (Formby), P.Wiencke (Formby), T.Asbury (Hightown), K.Brennan (Hightown), D.Warren (Hightown), I.Cowell (Clerk, Ince Blundell), K.Sharpe (Ince Blundell), L.Kolassa (Little Altcar), J.Desmond (Maghull), R.Baker (Melling), D.Miles (Thornton), Chris White (SMBC-Neighbourhoods), Ian Willman (SMBC-Neighbourhoods)

APOLOGIES:

Cllrs A.Ibbs (Little Altcar), M.Byrne (Maghull), J.Duffy (Clerk, Sefton), M.Duffy (Sefton), C.Jones (Sefton), Ian Maher (SMBC), Andrea Watts (SMBC)

1. GUEST SPEAKER

Ian Willman – Service Manager for Neighbourhoods & Partnerships, SMBC

Chris White – Manager of Area Co-ordinators Team, Neighbourhoods & Partnerships, SMBC

“Parish Charter”

1.1 Current Situation

The Parish Charter is on both the SMBC intranet and internet pages. It is advertised widely on the Staff Noticeboard on the intranet, and has been raised with the Senior Leadership Team.

Ian stressed they were keen to hear of any ‘blockages’ regarding adherence to the Parish Charter, and admitted they need to listen to Parish and Town Councils even more so in such times of austerity to find out how they can work better with us and ultimately deliver key services better. It was agreed further efforts need to be made by SMBC to drive out the message of the Parish Charter.

Reference was made to a document entitled, “New Realities”. This is an agreement between SMBC, the Third Sector and the Voluntary Sector, which outlines how voluntary activities can be delivered without the usual difficulties, i.e. licenses and other red tape; thus enabling Communities to become more resilient.

Mention was also made to funding which has been sought for the next few years to assist with the delivery of sustainable Christmas activities.

1.2 Questions / Comments

- (a) Cllr Colbert and Cllr Asbury expressed their disappointment that Ian Maher the Leader of SMBC was not present. Cllr Colbert then stressed that Aintree Village PC is 100% in support of the Charter, although they are concerned that this document is fantastic on paper but not so in reality. Cllr Colbert believes that SMBC Officers either don’t know the full extent of the Charter, or they are simply choosing to ignore it. He is frustrated that himself and fellow Councillors are adhering to the Charter, yet seemingly getting nowhere despite doing so.
 - *Ian stressed that his team are there to assist, and he could only offer his apologies about this. He genuinely thought enough had been done to promote the Charter to colleagues, and he is keen to hear about any ‘blockages’ with this. He asked that we contact either himself or Chris with any problems. Ian explained that the Neighbourhood Department covers a vast Agenda from Organised Crime to Grass Cutting, and he is keen to find a solution to this problem to ensure that SMBC and the PCs/TCs continue to work consistently in Partnership.*
- (b) Ian Cowell made reference to the difficulty encountered recently when trying to contact Diane Humphreys of the Planning Department by telephone regarding a recent complaint submitted by Ince Blundell PC about development of Greenbelt land. As the SMBC Call Centre would not provide her contact number, this complaint was raised under the Local Plan. Surely the unwillingness of SMBC staff to provide contact

numbers is a failure of SMBC to enable us to communicate with one another, thus failing to adhere to the Parish Charter?

- (c) Cllr Gill also expressed 100% support for the Parish Charter, and thanked the group involved in its' revision. He feels the problem is with interpretation of the Charter, e.g. Item 47, "Finances" which states Parish Councils will set their Parish Precept equitably. He added that Aintree Village PC has lost £34k from their Precept this year, and he feels it's unfair they should pay for maintenance of their Park when other non-Parished areas don't have to.
 - *As Ian was unable to answer this question he suggested Margaret Rawding, SMBC's Chief Finance Officer as a suitable contact.*
- (d) Cllr Coles was keen to stress the amount of work involved in revising the Parish Charter and in its' subsequent delivery. He feels SMBC still have a lot of work to do with regards delivery of the Charter, and reminded Ian that he had offered to present the Charter to Officers, yet he is still waiting for his offer to be taken up! Cllr Coles is still prepared to do this, and feels time should be allotted accordingly.
 - *Ian explained that SMBC have been going through a major re-organisation.*
- (e) Formby PC is aware that SMBC are looking to divulge more powers to PCs/TCs. SMBC must therefore ensure their communication with PCs/TCs is 1st class, as they will be scrutinising how they go about this.
 - *Ian will ask Alex and/or Sue to attend future meetings of the group. The Chair also extended an open invite for members of SMBC staff to attend our meetings.*
- (f) The Chair stated that in November 2015 he'd spoken to Gary Beswick of SMBC who was unaware of the Parish Charter!
- (g) Cllr Warren commented on an apparent disinterest when raising Parish issues at Area Committee meetings, and also on the apparent lack of knowledge about local issues. As a result he feels unsupported at these meetings.
- (h) What impact could the closure of the Area Committees have, and when will we see a report on the Area Committees Review?
- (i) The need for an up-to-date Organisation Chart for SMBC was raised to prevent needlessly having to contact the Chief Executive.
 - *Ian explained that a new Heads of Planning, Communications, Corporate and Childrens' Services had recently been appointed. He agreed to forward to the Secretary the most recent Organisation Chart compiled by Jill Coule, Head of Regulation, Compliance & Governance for SMBC, who has also offered to attend a future meeting of the group.*
- (j) The Chair stressed that 1 of the main aims of the 10 Parishes Committee is working in Partnership with SMBC. He is saddened this is apparently not happening after all the hard work that went into the revision of the Parish Charter. Cllr Coles added there needs to be a more consistent approach in what PCs/TCs expect from SMBC.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (19/11/15)

Cllr Baker proposed that the Minutes were a true and accurate record of the Meeting and Cllr Colbert seconded this. Those present were in agreement.

Cllr Coles commented that he found Jane Kennedy's input at the last meeting a little underwhelming as it predominantly focused on money. A 4 pence increase on Council Tax has been suggested to counteract the reduction to the Police Budget.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Focus Group – Wind Turbines, West Lancashire

The suggestion to form a small Focus Group to prepare a letter on this subject was raised under Point 4: Correspondence, paragraph 3 on the previous Minutes. The Chair requested that all members of the Focus Group go through the Clerk in future, to avoid confusion and to ensure that all members of this group are included and fully consulted.

3.2 Fracking

Raised under point 5: Future Speakers on the previous Minutes, Cllr Warren took it upon himself to invite Cllr Carl Brennan from Hightown PC along to present to the group on fracking in a non-political way.

Cllr Brennan stated that fracking is expensive, untested, harmful to the environment, and employs the use of chemicals which are carcinogenic and can leak into the water table; thus upsetting water tables. In some cases fracking has also been known to lead to small earthquakes. Fracking companies now argue that things have changed and that this process is now 'cleaner'.

In the UK fracking is currently high profile, given that the Government feel we're too heavily reliant on gas imports, since 15% of our gas supply is currently imported from Russia.

There are economic arguments for moving forward with this notion, as this could be economically attractive to Local Authorities who would get 100% of business rates from this, and this could also drive energy prices down due to competition between providers. It could even be the case that the Government steps in should a Local Authority appear to be deliberately obstructive with regards fracking.

- (a) Concerns were raised that such companies could simply take over land for explorative work.
- (b) Concerns were raised about the safety of such work. It was suggested that offshore pumping might be safer?
- (c) How can we be sure that fracking won't affect the water table?
- Admittedly in the USA fracking did cause a manner of problems. The UK Government however state that the process is very safe since there are many regulations to adhere to.
- (d) Surely the chemicals that would be pumped into the ground as part of the fracking process could seep into the water system?
- The chemicals used are not as toxic as there were previously.
- (e) It was suggested that the fracking process be trialled with very careful monitoring from the Government.
- The Queen's land cannot be used for this process, although permission has just been granted to utilise National Parks.

4. CORRESPONDENCE

- * Cllr Ron Baker, Melling PC - 20/11/15
- Advising that Liverpool City Region Combined Authority is leading the way as the 1st authorities to introduce a Dog DNA database. Contact details for this were provided as Cllr Phil Davies (Chairman), Town Hall, Brighton Street, Wallasey, CH44 8ED. Tel: (0151) 691 8540.
- * Cllr Mike Chambers, Thornton PC - 17/12/15
- In light of recent new build properties in the Thornton area, Cllr Chambers was asking how to go about enlarging the Parish boundaries to include these properties
➤ Ian Cowell stated that this would be a decision for SMBC to make.
- * Ian Cowell, Clerk to Ince Blundell PC - 18/12/15
- Information about objecting to the Wind Farm
- * Glyn Harris, Clerk to Aintree Village PC - 20/12/15
- Provision of Stephen Gent's details as Temporary Clerk
➤ Aintree Village PC will soon be advertising for a new Clerk to replace Glyn Harris who has retired for personal reasons
- * SMBC Planning - 2/12/15, 6/1/16, 13/1/16
- Weekly Planning lists 20/1/16 + 27/1/16
- * Margaret Carney, Chief Executive SMBC - 3/1/16
- In response to our email dated 24/12/15 about Dog DNA, Margaret agreed to get the relevant Officer to consider this suggestion, and to respond to the Secretary and Chair accordingly.
- * Andrea Watts, SMBC - 4/1/16 + 6/1/16
- Tendering her Apologies as unable to attend 10 Parishes meeting on 28/1/16 and stating she will be sending Ian Willman as her substitute
- * Robert Monks, Environment & Public Health Department SMBC - 7/1/16
- Confirming receipt of our email dated 24/12/15 about Dog DNA

- * Johnny Duffy, Clerk Sefton PC - 8/1/16
 - Request for representation to be made by this group to SMBC to support parking restrictions in Sefton Village, and for a representative of this group to be nominated to attend a meeting with the Punchbowl, Parish Council and PCC
 - *The Chair agreed to a representative of this group attending a meeting in relation to this matter.*
 - Advising that people will no longer be directed to Parish Clerks to discuss Council Tax matters or the role of the Parish Council in setting the precept. Instead citizens will be advised to contact Clerks for information on *parish budgets and other activities*.
 - An copy of an email from John Guest was forwarded which thanked Johnny Duffy for his complimentary comments about his colleagues Helen and Sue who assisted with the Council Tax/Precept matter mentioned above.

- * Kevin Sharpe, H-Alt Action Group - 12/1/16
 - A copy of a newsletter entitled "Stop the Plan for 12 Wind Turbines next to your town/ Village was forwarded for our attention.

- * Cllr David Warren, Hightown PC - 12/1/16
 - Advising that Bill Esterson has offered to attend our meeting, and that a Parish Councillor who has written a summary report on Fracking has also offered to speak at our next meeting.

- * Ian Cowell, Clerk to Ince Blundell PC - 12/1/16
 - Circulation of a template Objection letter about the Wind Turbines

- * Cllr Ann Ibbs, Little Altcar PC - 13/1/16
 - Apologies for the meeting on 28/1/16 as Cllr Ibbs will be in New Zealand

- * Ian Rowlands, Environment Agency - 19/1/16
 - Further to contact from our Secretary in response to recent flooding, Ian explained that he still works for the EA on a part time basis as an Advisor to the Cumbria Partnership & Strategic Overview team. Since the introduction of new legislation in 2010, the EA is responsible for ensuring that the country improves its' approach to reducing the risk of flooding and to responding to floods when they happen. At a local level as a result of the Flood and Water Management Act of 2010, Lead Local Flood Authorities have been set up and have responsibility for managing local flood risk from surface water, ground water and ordinary watercourse, and also for the investigation of flooding, and providing advice to Planning Authorities. Main river and coastal flooding remains the responsibility of the EA.
 - *Concerns were raised about the potential closure of the Churchtown Pumping Station, which could result in the reliance on 10-12 smaller Pumping Stations which would be costly to maintain. It was stressed that there is clearly a need to do something about the blocked drains throughout the Borough.*

- * Rob Van, Environment Agency - 20/1/16
 - Confirming that date of next meeting is 31/3/16 & states he will try and attend

- * Lynne Prescott (PA to Ian Maher, SMBC), Johnny Duffy (Clerk Sefton PC), Cllr Carol Jones (Sefton PC) - 28/1/16
 - Apologies for 10 Parishes Meeting on 28/1/16

5. FUTURE SPEAKERS

- * Ian Maher, Leader of Sefton Council + Margaret Carney, Chief Executive Sefton Council
 - SMBC Budgets / possible withdrawal of Precept & scrapping of S.106 monies

(Discussion ensued as to which year SMBC will be removing the £11k Council Tax support grant to Aintree Village PC)

- * Jill Coule – Head of Regulation, Compliance & Governance, SMBC

- * Rob Van + Ian Rowlands, Environment Agency
 - Recent Flooding

- * Dan Stevens, Chief Fire Officer
 - Re: Proposals to close more Fire Stations including Crosby, and to get rid of more Firefighters

- * Peel Holdings
 - Since the Local Plan still makes no reference to the future Port development!

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Wind Farm development, West Lancashire

Ian Cowell, Clerk to Ince Blundell PC urged those present who wished to object to this proposal to go on the H-ALT website and utilise the template letters provided for this purpose. The consultation period has been extended for a further 21 days as official notices were not put up in relation to this. It was queried what action had been taken by Lydiate PC with regards this, and agreed that the Secretary contact them to find out. A collective press release from the group was suggested initially, but then it was decided best that individual PCs/TCs submit their own individual responses as this might have more impact, plus Cllr Desmond was unsure that his colleagues would support this suggestion.

7. AREA ROUND UP

7.1 Aintree Village PC

* Reference was made to the NALC Transitional Fund, which offers upto £25k funding.

7.2 Hightown PC

* Reference was made to a letter written by Joe Benton dated 21/10/13 which mentions the inadequate service provision by SSP being referred to the Secretary of State if no improvements were forthcoming. Notably it was this letter that prompted Hightown PC to take action.

* SSP will be gone by the end of February 2016 when a temporary provider will take over from 1 of the Formby Practices.

* This year the PC successfully provided a Christmas tree and LED lights for a mere £230. Although £330 was also paid out to an electrical contractor to install a new safe socket, this cost was later met by SMBC as it was considered to be a capital expenditure cost. Interestingly this decision was made after the PC threatened SMBC with bad press after SMBC requested £20 from the PC for electricity for the Christmas tree lights.

7.4 Ince Blundell PC

* From 2017/18 PCs/TCs with a budget of less than £25k have the option to opt out and select their own Auditor. Those electing to opt out must make their decision known by 31/3/16. A fee of £200 will be payable for those Councils who opt in. Grants will be made available to eligible Councils through the Government Transparency Fund for key purchases, i.e. computer and printer.

7.5 Maghull TC

* Maghull PCT will be closing their Practice in the grounds of Parkhaven Trust with patients being transferred to the Westway Medical Centre.

7.6 Melling PC

* Melling PC are currently in limbo with their Neighbourhood Plan, and are facing consultancy costs of c.£17k to continue with the project. They have emailed Cllr Coles of Formby PC regarding the Consultant they employed. A potential conflict of interest has been discovered with regards 1 of their Lead Councillors on this project, who seemingly failed to declare an interest, given he is a Director of the firm they were using. There are grave concerns that this could leave Melling residents in the situation were they don't get a say on 2 key developments proposed for the area.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of this group will be held on Thursday 31st March, 2016 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber at Maghull Town Hall.