

ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND REVIEW PANEL

Meeting held on Tuesday, 20th March, 2018 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr D.S. Gladstone (Chairman)

Cllr Mrs. D.B. Bedford

Cllr J.B. Canty

Cllr K. Dibble

Cllr C.P. Grattan

Cllr Marina Munro

Cllr J.J. Preece

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr A. Jackman.

20. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th February, 2018 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

21. **REVIEW OF CHRISTMAS 2017 ACTIVITY AND PROPOSALS FOR 2018**

David Phillips, Town Centre and Cultural Manager, and Jenny Atherton, Town Centre and Events Officer, attended the meeting to provide a review of the Christmas activity carried out in the Borough in 2017. The total budget for all of the events across the Borough had been £11,000, there had been an additional £3,250 raised in sponsorship and grants.

Events in Aldershot had included:

- Christmas Lights Switch-On – Saturday 18th November
- Christmas Craft Fayres - Saturday 2nd and 9th December
- Aldershot Communities Together (ACT) Christmas Festival – 3 weekends of activities leading up to Christmas including ‘Community Christmas Celebration’ on Saturday 9th December, ‘Light Up Aldershot Day and Lantern Procession’ on Saturday 16th December and ‘ACT Festival & Carol Concert’ on Saturday 23rd December

The ACT activities had been organised by the ACT sub group of 15 volunteers. There had been £3,000 allocated to the three weekends of activity, all of which had been well attended. Also in Aldershot had been the North Town Carols on 20th December which had been led by Cllr Keith Dibble and sponsored by Vivid, which attracted approximately 100 visitors.

Events in Farnborough had included:

- Farnborough Frost Fair – Saturday 18th November which had also coincided with the Princes Mead lights switch-on
- Magical Elf Trail – Saturday 2nd December which had involved ten retailers across Queensmead, Princes Mead and The Meads
- Christmas Fun Day – Saturday 9th December
- Craft Fayre and Brass Band – Saturday 16th December

In addition there had been a best Christmas shop window display competition which had been open to retailers across the whole Borough. The judging had been led by ACT volunteers and photographs had been taken of all shops which had Christmas window displays of which there had been over 200.

The Panel discussed the cost of a permanent tree and lights in North Camp which had been requested at the meeting in September 2017. The Panel was advised that due to the Council's financial commitments and, as the provision of a tree and lights was currently not a Council priority or on the Cabinet's work programme, it would not be possible to be funded by the Council. One suggestion was to bid for funding from Blanchere Illuminations UK or through sponsorship from local businesses. Jenny Atherton offered to facilitate the bid for lights. If the bid was successful the location of the lights would need to be agreed although the preferred option was for neighbourhood centres rather than the main town centres.

David Phillips and Jenny Atherton had already met with the Princes Mead Centre Manager who had indicated that Princes Mead would be keen to work with The Meads, Queensmead and other partners on future Christmas activity.

Cllr Keith Dibble thanked Jenny Atherton for her help with the North Town Carols event which had been very well received by the community and local businesses had got involved. The Panel was advised that, if other neighbourhood areas were interested in setting up something similar, it was important to get local businesses on board.

The **PANEL** noted the Christmas 2017 review and **AGREED** the proposed action for additional lights/trees.

Action to be taken	By whom	When
Facilitate the Blanchere bid for Christmas lights. Work to be carried out with John Trusler, the Council's Principal Engineer, to explore the possibility of a Christmas tree in Farnborough and North Camp. Encourage Princes Mead and The Meads to explore other options for additional Christmas lights/trees.	Jenny Atherton	August 2018

22. PARKING CHARGES NOTICES

The Panel received information on the problems experienced by residents and visitors with private parking firms in Rushmoor following a motion supported at the Council meeting on 22nd February 2018. Tony Griffiths from NHS Property Services and Cllr Alex Crawford joined the meeting to provide information to the Panel on the issues and proposed action.

Tony Griffiths advised the Panel that NHS Property Services managed a large proportion of Health Centres and GP Practices across the country, of which Aldershot Centre for Health (ACH) was one of the larger sites. There had been a number of issues with parking on the site since the ACH had been established and in 2016 tenants and users got together to develop a workable parking solution. An Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system had been introduced in 2016 which recorded car registration numbers at the entrance and the registration number was then entered into the pay machine with an opportunity to top up if required when the visitor left. It was clear that the system had not been working due to the number of complaints that had been received. There were a number of issues, which included the ANPR system picking up the registration number at the traffic lights instead of the car park entrance and there were also issues with electrical fluctuations which caused the system to reset itself. When users had received inappropriate Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) the NHS Property Services had aimed to have them cancelled as soon as issued or rescinded when appealed.

It was recognised that users had experienced a number of problems with the system which included:

- The keyboard being quite low and difficult to operate to enter registration numbers.
- Unclear information regarding the free 15 minutes parking and the requirement to enter registration numbers.
- A lack of clear signage as to the procedures, in particular the option to top up parking on exit which caused confusion for users.
- Blue badge holders not understanding the need to take the badge in to reception and also a reluctance to remove the badge from the car for fear of receiving a PCN.
- PCNs being issued even when users had purchased tickets and no understanding or leniency from Smart Parking when genuine mistakes had been made.

Cllr Alex Crawford had carried out a survey to gather information on the parking issues in the Borough which highlighted a large number of issues with the parking at ACF. A petition had also been launched which had approximately 2,000 signatures. Cllr Crawford had recommended to NHS Property Services that the contract with Smart Parking should be cancelled immediately and the parking system at ACF was brought in house. Cllr Crawford stated that Smart Parking had not applied for planning permission to install the signage therefore the PCNs issued were illegal and criminal.

Tony Griffiths advised that NHS Property Services had heard the messages from councillors and users and were acting to make changes. For reasons of commercial

confidentiality he was unable to provide any detail but a number of meetings had been held with Smart Parking to make clear that the current situation was wholly unacceptable. NHS Property Services acknowledged that changes were needed to improve the customer experience and plans were in place to change the operating system. The Council, Clinical Commissioning Group and patient participation groups would be asked to be involved in developing a new operating system. NHS Property Services assured the Panel that they were committed to delivering changes and would proactively communicate to users the move from an unacceptable system to providing a suitable alternative. Any future operating system would be managed by NHS Property Services and there would be no incentive for operating contractors to issue PCNs. Tony Griffiths would look into the issues regarding the installation of the signage as raised by Cllr Crawford.

The Panel discussed the parking issues at ACH and agreed that something needed to be done urgently to address the current problems. It was also agreed that there should be an independent appeals process for the PCNs issued. Cllr Crawford advised that there was a Private Members Bill passing through Parliament to introduce a new parking code of practice. This included any appeals process. The Panel was of the view that the contract with Smart Parking should be cancelled as soon as possible.

Tony Griffiths informed the Panel that a new solution would be introduced in the Summer or early Autumn and NHS Property Services would communicate the changes well in advance of implementation. In the interim NHS Property Services would work to address the immediate problems and would take on board the recommendations set out in the Citizen's Advice Bureau report which had been circulated to the Panel. NHS Property Services would welcome the introduction of a statutory code of practice which parking operators would need to adhere.

The Panel **AGREED** that a letter should be sent to NHS Property Services from the Chairman setting out a summary of the key issues and concerns.

Ann Greaves, Solicitor to the Council, explained the background of the sale of the Council's housing stock, including the garages, to Rushmoor Housing Association in 1995. There was no requirement in the sale that the garages would remain with the houses. A covenant was included in the sale that meant the housing association could not develop the garage blocks other than for affordable housing or parking, any other type of development would require a percentage of the sale being paid to the Council. The Cabinet had approved the sale of the garage blocks by Vivid (formerly First Wessex) to Hampshire Garages providing the covenant was upheld. The Cabinet had been advised that consultation would take place and agreement would also have been required from Homes England (formerly the Homes and Community Agency). Quest had since bought out the shares from Hampshire Garages and then had started to dispose of the garages in blocks. The Council had no control over the sale or operation of the garage blocks and was unable to object to the sale of the garages as that would result in an injunction from Quest. As Quest owned the land there was no legal action that the Council was able to take.

Cllr Crawford advised the Panel of issues experienced by residents in Tices Meadow, Aldershot. The garage blocks had been sold and were being operate by a

private parking company and residents were now being charged to park at the garage sites. A number of residents had received PCNs when the parking charges had been introduced. The residents felt that there had been no consideration for them by the Council or Vivid through any of the process. The residents advised that there had been no consultation carried out by Vivid. Cllr Crawford proposed that the Council should advise residents of what their legal rights were. Ann Greaves explained to the Panel that the legal rights of each of the plots would vary and residents should be advised to seek their own legal advice. The plots affected would be shared with Cllr Crawford.

The Panel **AGREED** that a letter would be sent to Vivid from the Chairman to request attendance at a meeting to discuss the sale of the garage blocks and parking issues and explore the issue of consultation. A letter would also be sent to the current proprietors of the garage blocks and private parking providers from the Chairman to ask them to also attend a meeting to discuss current practices and residents' concerns. Panel members would be invited to attend any meetings arranged.

Cllr Crawford advised the Panel on issues experienced by parking users at other sites around the Borough which were operated by private parking firms. Overall users felt that the private parking companies operating in Rushmoor were deliberately misleading users and making the restrictions unclear which caused users to fall foul of the rules. Cllr Crawford would submit his evidence gathered to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG)(formerly Department of Communities and Local Government) to be considered to inform the requirements of the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill 2017-19.

The Panel **AGREED** that the Chairman would write to the HCLG setting out the issues raised at the meeting in support of the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill 2017-19. A letter would also be sent to Leo Docherty MP setting out the key concerns and seeking support for the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill 2017-19 through the Parliamentary process.

Action to be taken	By whom	When
A letter to be sent to NHS Property Services from the Chairman setting out a summary of the key issues and concerns discussed at the meeting.	Panel Administrator/ Lead Officer/ Chairman	30 March 2018
A letter to be sent to Vivid from the Chairman to request attendance at a meeting to discuss the sale of the garage blocks and parking issues and explore the issue of consultation.	Panel Administrator/ Lead Officer/ Chairman	30 March 2018
A letter to be sent to the current proprietors of the garage blocks and private parking providers from the Chairman to invite them to attend a meeting to discuss current practices and resident's concerns.	Panel Administrator/ Lead Officer/ Chairman	30 March 2018

A letter to be sent to HCLG setting out the parking issues in support of the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill 2017-19.	Panel Administrator/ Lead Officer/ Chairman	30 March 2018
A to be sent to Leo Docherty MP from the Chairman setting out key concerns and seeking his support for the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill 2017-19 through the Parliamentary process.	Panel Administrator/ Lead Officer/ Chairman	30 March 2018

23. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel **NOTED** the current work programme.

The meeting closed at 9.45 pm.

CLLR D.S. GLADSTONE (CHAIRMAN)
