

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Planning & Regeneration Committee meeting held at 7:00pm on Tuesday 10 February 2015, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Ashington, NE63 8RX

PRESENT:

Councillors: Mark Purvis (Chair) Keith Chambers
Marjorie Chambers Stephen Fenwick
Wyn Stewart Pauline Thompson
Ely Turnbull
Avril Chisholm (*non-Cttee Member*)
Glyn Davies (*non-Cttee Member*)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mike Slaughter – Town Clerk
Stephen Humphrey – Funding & Projects Officer
Sue Coulthard – Snr. Admin. Officer
Members of the Public – 1

P&R15/72 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Les Alderson, Victor Bridges, Louis Brown, Vicky Brown, Lawrence Henderson, Maggie Lang, Kris Lavery, Liam Lavery, Wyn Stewart and Bob Walkinshaw.

P&R15/73 2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of personal and prejudicial interest.

P&R15/74 3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the former Planning & Amenities Committee meeting held on 16 December 2014, were agreed and signed as a true record.

P&R15/75 4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

P&R14/66 Proposed Housing Development at North Seaton (Planning Application No. 14/03715/OUT): The Town Clerk reported that this Outline Planning Application was to be considered by the Northumberland County Council South East Area Planning Committee on 17 March 2015.

P&R14/70 Joint Meeting of Ashington Town Council and Ashington Town Team with ARCH re future developments in the town: The Town Clerk reported that the provisional date for the joint meeting and site visit to the new Community & Leisure Facility was Monday 9 March 2015.

P&R15/76 5. COMMUNITY TRANSPORT – FORMER A2 BUS SERVICE

The Town Clerk informed members that, further to the resolution taken by the committee on 16 December 2014, discussions had taken place on 8 January 2015 with Jan Chisholm (Northumberland County Council Community Transport Officer) and Lynne McIntosh (Watbus). Members were informed that The Town Council had been represented by the Chair of the Committee, the Chair of Finance & General Purposes, the Leader of the Council, and Cllr. Marjorie Chambers.

The Town Clerk reminded members that the former A2 bus service had not been a commercially viable operation and this had resulted in private operators withdrawing from the service route. Members were informed that it had been established that if such a service was to be re-introduced, it would be in the form of a community transport scheme. Watbus had confirmed that community transport schemes operated on a paid membership-only basis and that users would be issued with a members pass.

The Town Clerk reported that information provided by Watbus regarding the potential costs of providing such a scheme along with a timetable had been circulated prior to the meeting. Members were informed that the daily inclusive operational cost would be £150 and that it had been proposed to run a one day a week service for a trial period in order to gauge demand.

A lengthy discussion followed regarding the proposal to provide a pilot scheme for a trial period of up to three months. Not all members were convinced that there was still sufficient demand for

such a service a year after the withdrawal of the former A2 service. It was felt however that a pilot scheme would demonstrate whether there was sufficient unmet demand, particularly amongst elderly residents who may not have been able to find, or afford, alternative travel arrangements.

It was agreed that the pilot scheme, if so agreed, would need to be well advertised in order to get the best possible results. The Town Clerk outlined the applicable regulations of the Transport Act 1985, and in particular the Section 19 “standard permits”. The Town Clerk stressed that it was important that all members understood the operational aspects of the proposed scheme as there were a number of key differences from commercially operated fare schemes.

Members were advised that any scheme should follow the type of “shopper services” schemes currently operating within Northumberland where:-

- The services offered a regular timetabled services where passengers could wait in a designated places for the community bus,
- The designated places must be away from conventional bus stops,
- The agreed route must avoid any perceived competition with conventional, commercially operated bus services,
- The service passengers must register by payment of an agreed fee either with the operator or local council,
- A formal membership pass was issued as proof of eligibility; and
- The local council took responsibility for paying the community transport operator.

The Town Clerk reported that, were the pilot scheme to be operated for a full three-month trial period then the gross subsidy cost to the town council, before any membership fee income would be £1,950 for a 13-week period.

The Chair reminded members that, were such a scheme to be successful, it would not lead to an extension of the service or the

introduction of more operational days funded by the Town Council; the purpose of the pilot scheme was to demonstrate whether there was sufficient demand in order to then lobby a commercial operator for the re-introduction of a limited service that could be effective, well used and commercially viable.

Resolved:

That:-

- (i) A Community Transport “Pilot Scheme” be agreed based on the suggested “shuttle route”,**
- (ii) The Pilot Scheme operate on a Tuesday only for an initial 3-month period from April to June 2015 (13 weeks),**
- (iii) The membership fee for all users (with no concession) be set at £10 for the duration of the scheme,**
- (iv) The Town Clerk be delegated to look at the detail and practicalities of the membership scheme, and to introduce a administrative arrangement convenient for both the Town Council and service users,**
- (v) The maximum gross cost of £1,950 (before any membership revenues) be agreed and met from the general reserves of the Town Council,**
- (vi) The full scheme details be set out in the forthcoming Town Council newsletter; and that**
- (vii) An operational review and assessment be carried out prior to the ending of the trial period, and at an early date should it be the case that there be insufficient user demand for the service.**

P&R15/77 7. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

There was no other urgent business.

P&R15/78 8. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Planning & Regeneration Committee was agreed for Tuesday 14 April 2015, in the Town Hall, Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.