

BLACKPOOL COUNCIL
REPORT
of the
HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
to
THE SANDHURST AREA PANEL

THE SANDHURST AREA FORUM MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 7TH JULY 2008

1. Introduction

The Vice Chairman, Mr Gary Pretty, (Community Member) welcomed residents to the newly formed Sandhurst Area Forum. Mr Pretty explained that at the Sandhurst Area Panel meeting that had taken place on Tuesday 13th May, he had been elected as Vice Chairman, and Councillor Jebson had been Elected Chairman. Unfortunately Councillor Jebson was unable to attend to Forum meeting therefore Mr Pretty took the Chair for the evening.

The Vice Chairman introduced the members of the Panel, Councillor Williams (Anchorsholme) and Councillors Clapham and Mitchell (Bispham) and Councillor Callow and Mrs Callow (Norbreck), along with the other newly appointed Community Member Mr Colin Shrive. It was announced that the two Community Representatives would remain in post until January 2009. Nomination forms for the full membership of 3 Community Representatives were available for those who wished to be considered after this date. The deadline for receipt of nomination forms was 19th December 2008.

During the Panel meeting that took place on 13th May, potential single-issue topics that would form the basis of either a Special Area Forum or ordinary Area Forum had been discussed. It had been agreed due to the high level of local interest, an update on the Bispham and Norbreck Gala, the Town Green Status of Whiteholme Playing Fields and the Blackpool tramway upgrade would be beneficial and of interest to residents.

2. Theme – Bispham and Norbreck Gala

Mr Nick Hamilton, Chairman of Bispham and Norbreck Gala Committee for the past 10 years was in attendance and provided the attendees with the historical background to the Gala and an update of the current arrangements for the procession of 2008.

Bispham and Norbreck Gala had first been formed back in 1893 by two local business men and up until the late 1960's the parade, had taken place on a Wednesday until it was finally moved to a Saturday.

The overall cost to run the Gala was outlined as being within the region of £6,000. In recent years the annual increase of running and managing the Gala had been in the region of £600 - £800. The increase was due to the rising costs of public liability insurance, refuse collections, portable toilets and road safety equipment.

The Gala Committee relied heavily on the kind donations of the general public, the sales of advertising spaces with the Gala Programmes together with table top sales. All monies remaining following the Gala event were donated directly to the Children's Hospice, therefore making the Committee a non profit gaining organisation.

It was reported that this year the Gala would be held on Saturday 19th July and the procession would follow the tradition route of from the Whiteholme playing fields, along to Red Bank Road, down Sandhurst Avenue, before making its way back to the playing fields. A number of family orientated events would be held on the playing fields that include the crowning of the Rose Queen, fairground attractions, dancing and competitions.

At present the Gala Committee membership was considered somewhat limited, therefore the workload was fairly heavy and consequently new members would be most welcome to help with the future organisation of the event.

Mr Hamilton outlined that local community groups from the area would be welcome to get involved with the event and raise their own community group profile. However, it was emphasised that the selling of raffle tickets and the display of collection boxes for their group would not be acceptable. The groups had to be actively supporting the Gala and not attending for their own personal gain.

Conclusion

The Vice Chairman thanked Mr Hamilton for his presentation and wished him every success with this year's event and urged residents to help out where possible.

3. Theme – Town Green Status

As Blackpool Council was both part landowner and registering Authority the matter had been passed to an impartial authority that had no registered interest in the fields. Stockport Metropolitan Council had agreed to adjudicate on behalf of Blackpool.

Mr Rhodri Price Lewis QC was appointed to conduct the inquiry, of which took place over a 2 day period in April of this year. During the inquiry, visits had been made to the land, evidence was submitted and witnesses were called. The statutory test that Mr Price Lewis had to weigh up was whether the land or any significant part of it was used for lawful sports or pastimes as of right for substantial periods of the relevant 20-year period.

The determination of the town green application had been presented to the Environment and Safety Committee at Stockport Metropolitan Council on Wednesday 18th June 2008, where the Committee had to ratify the ruling made by Mr Price Lewis.

The report put before the Committee highlighted that the statutory test had not been demonstrated and the evidence given to during the inquiry had failed to establish a relevant locality or neighbourhood within the locality and that was in any event fatal to the whole application.

Therefore the Whiteholme playing fields status remained unchanged.

The inquiry was fully explored and comprehensive, however, it was reported that there was nothing in law that would prevent another application being submitted.

As town green status had not been awarded to the area, it was highlighted that future planning applications could be submitted with regards to the possibility of the building of dwellings and businesses. Mr Brown emphasised that all submitted plans had to be considered alongside the Blackpool Local Plan 2001 – 2016 for the area and environmental and Council policies.

Conclusion

The Forum noted the result of the inquiry.

4. Theme – Blackpool Tramway Upgrade

Mr Alan Cavill, Assistant Director of Enterprise and Business Development at Blackpool Council was in attendance at the Forum.

The Blackpool tramway had been in existence for the past 120 years. The first promenade section had been opened in 1885 between Cocker Street, near Talbot Square and Dean Street, near South Pier.

It was reported that the tramway currently carried appropriately four million passengers per year and over 85% of which travel in the peak season between Easter and November. There was an existing fleet of 45 heritage vehicles and the service was operated by Blackpool Transport Services although the Council owned and maintained the track.

In recent years over £20m had been spent on the tramway upgrade. This had allowed 10km of track to be replaced out of the total route length of 18km.

Blackpool tramway at present operated with dispensation from current legislation, however by the year 2019 the tramway had to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The regulations required easy access on to vehicles through level boarding, space inside the trams for wheelchairs, pushchairs and priority sitting.

At the end of 2007, Blackpool Council and Lancashire County Council had submitted a revised Business Case to the Department for Transport for a full reconstruction of the Blackpool tramway and on the 31st January 2008, the Secretary of State had confirmed that the scheme had received initial approval. Funding for the scheme would be provided by Blackpool Council, Lancashire County Council and the Department for Transport up to a maximum of £96m.

The main objective of the scheme was to deliver a modern, all year round, 10 minutes frequency fully accessible service between Starr Gate and Fleetwood. This would be supplemented by an intermediate 10 minute service between the Pleasure Beach and Thornton Gate during peak periods. It was anticipated that the end to end journey time would be improved by up to 15 minutes, with the overall journey time of less than one hour. This would be achieved by faster boarding times, better acceleration of the new vehicles and reducing the number of stops.

The remaining 8km of track would be reconstructed between Starr Gate and Fleetwood and the track would be designed and constructed to accommodate the new trams. In order to achieve the improved journey times, a number of highway crossings, 14 in total, would be reconstructed to provide tram priority and improved safety.

Whilst some sections of fencing had recently been replaced, all remaining sections would be replaced in the scheme. New tram stops would be built to allow boarding into the new trams via low height platforms.

The majority of the power supply, including substations, had been replaced in the late 1990's and the northern section was currently being upgraded. Therefore there was little further work required apart from the installation of the new poles on the northern end and the replacement of the catenary power supply wire.

The existing depot was in need of repair and the track in need of replacement. In addition, the existing facilities were not considered suitable to maintain a fleet of modern trams. The scheme envisaged the partial reconstruction of the existing depot. This would then allow new vehicles to be maintained. The heritage vehicles would continue to be maintained within the existing facilities and workshops.

The existing stabling shed would be rebuilt and the tracks in and around the depot would be reconstructed. The single track, allowing exit from the depot via Foxhall Square, would be reconstructed and a new junction created on the Promenade to allow access in both directions of the track.

There would be a total of 16 new single deck trams that in appearance would be similar to those found in most European countries. They would be approximately 30 metres long, and multiple doors and a seating capacity of up to 80 people.

The heritage vehicles could remain in operation and still be compliant with legislation, as the new 10 minute frequency service with the fully Disability Discrimination Act compatible new vehicles would be in operation. This would then ensure the presence of the historical vehicles, of which was a key attraction for many users.

Blackpool Council would maintain the heritage shelters whilst the standard shelters would be maintained by Blackpool Transport. There were proposals to convert part of the Bispham Tram Station, which was situated at the Red Bank Road junction of the promenade, and talks with the private sector on were going.

It was envisaged that the current programme of procurement of the various work and vehicle packages would commence in July 2008, with the full submission for the approval to be made to the Department of Transport in March 2009, and it was anticipated that the final scheme would be approved at the end of April 2009.

The overall construction period was 3 years and the completion and operation of the scheme and operation of the new vehicles would be completed by Easter 2012, with future plans to extend the service to Blackpool Airport and beyond.

Conclusion

The Forum welcomed the update report.