

**Notes of Community Conversation
Wallsend Ward
19 November 2013**

Present: Cllr Gary Madden (Chair), Cllr Margaret Finlay, Cllr Michael Huscroft, Felicity Shoesmith, Kate Lovelock, Francis Lowes, Carl McClean, Martin Craddock, Caroline Grist, Kevin Ridpath, John Thompson, Cait Foley, Alan Vaughan (Memorial Hall) and 13 members of the public.

1. Welcome, Housekeeping and Introduction to ‘Community Conversations

Cllr Madden opened the meeting, welcoming everyone to the new Community Conversation meeting for Wallsend ward. He explained that these meetings were new and had been set up to ensure people can get involved and having their say in what the council is doing at a ward level. These meetings replace Area Forums.

He also shared more information, saying details of the Community Conversation events for each ward will be included in the local press, on the council’s website and in the ‘Our North Tyneside’ magazine. In addition, information will be publishes in local libraries, community centres and other key places.

He then welcomed Kate Lovelock and Francis Lowes from the Regeneration team to give an update about Wallsend.

2. Regeneration of Wallsend Update – Kate Lovelock and Francis Lowes

Kate explained that she would give an update on the main developments to the town. She confirmed that the new Customer First Centre in Wallsend will be open In the new year, which will have shopping outlets on the ground floor. The demolition of Hedley Place is taking place and to make way for a new food store with free car parking. The intention is to increase the footfall into the town, and the provision of free parking should encourage this. In terms of shops, Mister Woods and Peacocks have both just opened. There are currently two supermarkets who are in discussion to having a store in Wallsend, but due to this being commercially sensitive information, no more detail on this can currently be shared.

In terms of plans for the re-development of the Swan Hunter site, a developer had already been appointed and major infrastructure works are underway to ready the site for development of advanced manufacturing units. It is proposed that the former library is demolished and replaced with housing. The former Police Station has been sold privately and a planning application is expected to be submitted.

Kate then asked for questions from residents.

(Q – question, C – comment, R – response)

Q. Is there a planning application in for the Ritz?

R. No.

Q. I would like to know where people can go for leisure and community space?

R. People will be able to use the new Customer First Centre once it is opened for community spaces and the Hadrian Leisure Centre is nearby and is fully equipped for a wide range of sports and leisure opportunities. The new Customer First Centre will have a range of prices for their spaces, depending on the nature of the group who would like to book a room.

Q. What about groups who would like to organise space for theatrical rehearsals?

R. I would suggest the Customer First Centre may be able to accommodate these, as well as the Memorial Hall in the town.

Q. What are the plans for the Buddle Art Centre site?

R. Tyne and Wear Preservation Trust have taken over the building. They intend to submit an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2014.

Q. I understand New River are knocking down Hedley Place. What are the plans there?

R. To replace with a supermarket with free car park and an access road from High Street west.

Q. Are there any plans you can share about the site of the former swimming baths?

R. There are no concrete plans in place at the moment. It is a listed site, so North Tyneside Council is constrained as to what can happen there. If we wanted to demolish it, we would have to seek permission from English Heritage. The Council has marketed this site on a number of occasions in order to test the market, this will be used as evidence in any application to English Heritage.

Q. I think inside the Ritz is beautiful, it's a real asset to Wallsend and I would not like to see it demolished. Can you confirm what will be happening there?

R. There are no planning applications in place for the Ritz and we are not aware of any new ownership arrangements.

3. Wallsend Parks Update – Carl McClean, Parks Service

Carl gave an informal update about the regeneration of Wallsend Parks. The council has spent £5 million pounds on improving and upgrading the park – this has included installing a café, toilets, and events field, paths have been refurbished, bins and benches replaced and a skate park has been added. Richardson Dees Park opened earlier in the year. The Hall is currently being landscaped and we expect it will be open again in the next 2 or 3 weeks. The outstanding jobs to be completed are the

fountain, signage, interpretation boards, and a sculpture trail. We will be recruiting a team specifically for parks, which will include a Park Keeper and an Assistant Park Keeper and 2 apprentices will start in January. There will also be an Education Service with one Education Officer and a pool of Education Wardens starting next year, and based at the Pavilion.

We had a range of very successful events over the summer with 5 000 people visiting the parks. We are currently planning for Santa's Winter Workshop and the School Carol Service and there will be a range of additional activities, using money from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which will include permanent orienteering and gallery space.

Carl then asked residents for questions.

(Q – question, C – comment, R – response)

Q. On the lower paths, there is loose rock going up to the lake. Can you advise if this is completed?

R. We are not happy with the stone finish on these paths. We are talking with the contractor at the moment and this is one of the issues on our snagging list, which we expect will be improved quickly.

Q. Have you had much vandalism in the park as things are improving?

R. We have not had much, no. Any time it has happened, we have captured this on CCTV and we have been out and about to young people's groups to educate them about the need to look after their environment.

Q. There is a real problem with young people buying chips at the café and then dropping the papers on paths in the park, which is an eyesore for the rest of us.

R. I would disagree with this comment, as this has not been our experience. People have picked up after themselves and volunteers in the park are helping with educating residents to look after their local environments.

Q. I think the café should not sell chips! Educating people is an uphill task and I think we could easily fall over the papers young people drop.

R. This has not been a regular occurrence.

Q. I would like to know about the Wallsend Burn, who manages that?

R. It is the responsibility of the Bio-diversity Officer.

The Chair thanked Carl for his informative update and then introduced Kevin Ridpath and John Thompson to give people an update on the Council and Capita's flooding response.

4. Flooding Response – Kevin Ridpath (Network Manager, Capita) and John Thompson (Construction Delivery Manager, Capita)

Kevin and John shared information which people had in their packs 'Reducing the risk of flooding in North Tyneside update November 2013'. They also used maps of the borough to demonstrate the issues that had been experienced by residents across the whole borough. They then went on to outline the issues that had been experienced in the Wallsend ward which were in Oak Grove and Appletree Gardens. They went through these schemes in great detail to assist people's understanding of the complexity of the work that was needed and the involvement of other partner agencies. Following this informal presentation, they then asked for questions from residents.

Q. Are the tree line streets included in your plans, by the Metro?

R. Yes. North Tyneside Council has taken on board the need for more street sweeps in the Autumn when the leaves are falling. There is a problem with leaves on the Metro line which causes problems too. In some instances, it would be necessary to return to some sites on an almost daily basis. There is an additional wagon which has been going through Wallsend with this specific focus, to clear the leaves.

Q. What plans are in place to make sure new housing won't be flooded in the future?

R. For all new housing developments as part of the planning process, there is a need to consult with the engineers at Capita and Northumbrian Water are also statutory consultees. Their role is to establish if the new housing would or would not be an issue. There is a current example I can give you at Station Road. We have been involved in the discussions and the new development cannot allow additional run off from the field, so initially the proposal was refused. There will need to be changes in terms of holding water, improvements to sewers and involvement from the Environment Agency.

Q. What's going to happen at King's Road? There is one entrance for traffic which goes too fast. You have to find a solution; would traffic lights be possible there?

R. We have plans for traffic lights to be installed at the top of Kings' Road. This is something we have been aware of for many years and we hope this will be in place very soon.

C. We are very clear we need to catch up on maintenance issues. In North Tyneside in the early 1990s we had a small fleet of gully wagons and this resulted in us not having many problems. We used to spend a lot of money on maintenance. However in more difficult times financially there has been a squeeze on budgets and we have had to make changes accordingly. We have in the region of 38 000 gullies in the borough and a maintenance programme to clean them on a regular basis. We now have one gully wagon and intend to buy a new one in the near future.

Q. What can be done about grass cuttings blocking the drains?

A. This is our most frequent conversation with Environmental Services. We had asked them to capture grass cuttings as they are cut and before they run down the sides of the drains. We are awaiting their response.

5. Consultation on the Local Plan – Martin Craddock and Caroline Grist, Capita

Martin and Caroline gave an informal presentation about the current Local Plan consultation. This is a 15 year plan that every local authority needs to have about the use of land in the borough. It gives the Local Authority much more local control. The Consultation Draft plan is currently out for consultation, this includes identifying potential development sites and the policies that will help to inform future planning decisions. This stage of the consultation closes on the 6th January 2014. Information has been given to all residents and full copies of the proposals are in the Libraries or available on line.

The Chair then asked for people to comment on what they had heard or ask any question they had.

Q. I find the information on the ward map not clear as it is not the same as the map you have there of the whole borough. Can you do something to stop this being confusing?

R. We adopted the approach we have in terms of providing whole borough and individual ward information, following previous consultations where residents said this is what they would find helpful.

Q. You referred to growth and economic growth; can you please explain the difference between the two?

R. Based on information we have been given by the Office for National Statistics, we are expecting the population in the borough to continue to increase. This will require us to look at more houses being built. This is what we mean by growth. As there are more households, we will need to provide more infrastructure in terms of services and jobs (e.g. doctors, shops etc). This is what we mean by economic growth.

C. You have talked about the numbers of new households being either 16 000 or 12 000. You will need to arrange to provide more business land / areas for retail opportunities alongside more housing. The Employment Land Review helps with this.

Q. Does the Riverside industrial land come into this?

R. Yes the intention is to retain this land for employment.

C. There is a right of way there and this should not be taken away without public consultation.

Q. According to the photos provided by Regeneration tonight, there is landscaping along the river. Will this happen?

R. Yes it is planned that we will bring this back.

Q. Fishing is a real recreation sport in this area. Will local people still be able to do this in your plans?

R. Yes we appreciate how people use the land currently and we hope this will continue to be possible for people to do.

6. Wallsend Memorial Hall Update – Alan Vaughan, Chair of Trustees

Alan came along to the meeting to provide residents with an update on the Memorial Hall. In mid-September the Memorial Hall ceased to exist as it had been previously. The Trading arm which included the events and the café ceased to be financially viable and it currently owes significant money to the company that had provided finance. It is a charity and as a result there are holdings on the building linked to that status. The building has been kept open since then with no paid staff and by involving significant number of volunteer hours. The trustees are doing their best to keep the building open and also pay back the loan that was taken out.

One issue the Trustees are trying to manage well is that one area of development was the beginning of a youth centre at the Memorial Hall using lottery funding. There have been a number of young people's sessions running on Fridays and Saturdays, attended by approximately 150 young people. There has been a range of creative activities on offer including art, craft, costumes and stilt walking. We had too many people come along last week and we had to turn some of them away.

We have discovered that some of the funding that has come to the Memorial Hall has been poorly spent over recent time. We are doing lots of work at the moment around the accounts, future projections, business planning, networking and renting out the space to groups. We are clear we need to attract more funding and more events in the future. At the moment we are taking short-term bookings, and we would very much welcome people's ideas, suggestions and bookings.

The Chair then asked for people to comment on what they had heard or ask any question they had.

C. I would like to say thank you for saving the Mem. I would like to suggest that you look at other examples locally as to how other companies like yours are run successfully, like the People's Theatre. That is run by amateurs with very few staff members.

C. I was involved in the Linskill Trust so we have experience and would be happy to help. We have a mailing list of about 8 000 people who we ask to share their ideas, when we are developing new things. You might wish to set some thing up like that too.

The Chair thanked Alan and all the speakers at the meeting. There were no additional questions from the floor, so he thanked everyone for coming along and then formally closed the meeting.