

Whitley Bay Ward Community Conversation
Thursday, 14 November
Whitley Bay Customer Services Centre

Present:

Cllr Sandra Graham (Chair), Cllr J O'Shea, Cait Foley – NTC, Felicity Shoesmith – NTC, Sarah Owen – NTC, Claire Dobinson-Booth - Capita, Rachel Watts –Capita, Andrew Mollon – Capita, Andrew Burnett – Capita, Linzie Pentleton – Northumbrian Water, Ben Drury - Whitley Bay Chamber of Trade, Cate Matthews - Book Happy, Hannah Fuller - Book Happy and 14 residents.

Apologies:

Cllr Pam Brooks, Duika Burges-Watson - Station Masters Centre, Dan Ellis - Jam Jar Cinema

2. Welcome and Introductions

Cllr Graham welcomed everyone to the Community Conversation meeting and gave a brief outline of what Community Conversations were all about and how they were a new way of engagement with local residents and then outlined the format and agenda for the evening.

3. Update from Whitley Bay Chamber of Trade

Ben Drury took the opportunity to tell people present about the current role of the Chamber and the events they organise to raise the profile of businesses locally and to revive the centre of Whitley Bay. He said that they are currently recruiting new members to the organisation and encouraged people to pass this onto others not present at the meeting. For further information, look at the website at www.wbcot.co.uk

4. Flooding

An informal presentation was given on what the council and its partners are doing to alleviate the flooding response within the ward. Information was shared in the packs with residents which detail the work programmes currently underway. Following the presentation, the engineers asked for individual questions:

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

Q. The water in Whitley Lodge came from the golf course and flooded Ashleigh Drive. Residents repeatedly rang and the Council did nothing. Home insurances have increased and North Tyneside Council did not attend – why? With water levels rising could residents have not been given help, could there not have been action at the time?

R. An officer was deployed at the time and assessed this as non-urgent. Investigations followed up after the event and works are taking place to rectify the issues raised. They are due to for completion in the near future.

Q. Visits have taken place by Phil Scott and Kevin Ridpath and residents involved with the above question have responded they are happy with the subsequent response and happy something has been done. There has been photos taken of the culvert where it is thought the problem is. There is concern of flooding again at the bottom of Ashleigh Drive due to the dip and culvert – is this being investigated?

R. The issue is not the culvert but the gullies and there has been significant money spent on cleaning to clear them. This is highway drainage system and the discovered issues have now been rectified.

Q. Do the street cleaners help clear the problems? Parked cars must cause an issue – could residents not be given notice when cleaners are coming to their street?

R. The street cleaners do help with removing leaves and they are out and about as much as possible helping to do this but notice is not given when the street cleaners are in a particular area. However when gully cleaners are sent out, a letter drop will happen requesting residents to move their cars.

Q. Why are the Council letting developers build on areas that flood e.g. Wellfield fields? Will they flood in the future?

R. Under legislation, builders have to try and hold water within the site, e.g. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS). Where there is a water course or sewer they are only allowed to release when these get to certain levels.

Q. There are water logged areas and you let them build why? The new houses must put pressure on old systems?

R. Developers come to Northumbrian Water with plans to be assessed and to see if they can build on the land. All networks are checked for capacity. Assessments are made on where each water course goes.

C. Planning staff present confirmed that there are regulations and assessments that must be carried out before permission is granted.

Q. What about surface water due to new roads?

R. The applicant must provide evidence that the water will not run off any quicker than at present.

Q. What if it doesn't?

R. This would only happen in the event of a major storm and the levels of water are extreme and are of such a capacity they can't cope.

Q. Another house by Marden Quarry (Marden House) flooded both sides with foul water. Is there a flood prevention scheme going to be put in? Are there going to be tanks implemented? Will Northumbrian Water separate surface water from foul water?

R. There is a North Tyneside Sustainable Study looking at areas where surface water can be taken away from locations. The Marden Quarry area is being looked into.

Q. Can you tell me the timescales for this work please?

R. The study will be completed by April 2014.

5. Book Happy

Hannah and Cate from Book Happy gave an brief overview of their new business and asked for views, ideas and comments to help them bridge the gap with schools, libraries and get children to love books. The Chair then asked if people had questions or suggestions to offer:

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

Q. I am delighted to hear about your new business. What does the activity cost?

R. Currently we do this on a cost per hour basis. However we are seeking funding which would allow us to offer free sessions. We think working in partnership with others would also bring the costs down.

Q. Have you worked with the ethnic families in the area as there may not many books at home, only school books. I would suggest you get in touch with the Islamic Centre.

R. We would be very keen to work with all areas of the community.

(A council officer present offered to share contact details with them)

Q. Do you work with baby and toddler groups?

R. Yes we have been working with a range of groups and are happy to be introduced to new groups.

Q. Do you use charts and other pictorial resources to help encourage young people to read? I have found that history charts are especially good with boys to get them interested in looking at different reading topics.

R. Yes we use them in after school groups with children and get a good response from them.

6. North Tyneside Local Plan

Cllr John O'Shea and Claire Dobinson-Booth gave an overview of the Local Plan, explaining its purpose, the current proposals and the current consultation. Within the information packs was a summary of the Whitley Bay ward proposals and a full copy is available on the Council's website. The consultation is due to end 6 January 2014.

Questions were then taken:

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

Q. About the population growth over the next 15 years, who decides this?

R. The Office of the National Statistics projects the numbers of population growth based on demographic evidence, which includes people living longer and people moving into the borough.

Q. What are you doing about affordable housing? I think developers don't want to include these in their plans. Developers pay North Tyneside Council money to do this but there have been some instances when it has not happened; is there a pot of money that the council hold which is growing?

R. North Tyneside Council are looking at potential sites to deliver new housing.

Q. The land at Murton Village, has this all been purchased by Persimmon Homes?

R. No, this is not the case. There are various owners of this land including Persimmon Homes, the Duke of Northumberland and other private organisations.

Q. We have lost appeals in the past where previously objected to planning applications are granted. Things happen against residents wishes.

R. It is appreciated that we have lost appeals and this new plan will help to stop this happening. All planning is a balance and this plan will be a tool to help.

Q. To what extent to do we encourage people to build low energy houses?

R. This draft plan encourages energy efficiencies and will push developers to deliver up the scale at 3, 4, and 5. Planning does actively encourage all developers to do this.

Q. Are there any applications submitted for the Rex hotel?

R. Nothing in planning at present. Regeneration is currently working with developers.

C. The Rex Hotel has been sold to create more retirement homes.

Q. The comments form to respond to is small on the attached document – could this be looked at for future publications?

R. Comments can be made via the website and consultation portal

7. Station Masters Centre / Garden

In Duika's absence, Cait gave an outline about this project. Information was available on each table. The community garden has received £80k in funding, which has led to substantial development in the garden. There is currently an agreement between the CAWCRA group, Nexus and DB Regio for this to be a community garden. The group are currently looking at access by all members of the community. More information is available at their website at www.stationmastersgarden.org

8. Table Discussions – Potential Improvements to Whitley Bay

Councillor Graham asked each table to consider how we can improve the town of Whitley Bay in a more co-ordinated way than is happening at present. The following points were raised in the discussions:

(Cllr Sandra Graham Table)

- Sustainability and impetus of current initiatives e.g. Station Master's Centre, Friends of St Mary's Garden, Friends of Marden Quarry
- Adopt appropriate schools
- Quarry – improvement to the Quarry – mud, flat, branches
- Dome – support October Event
- Events – bigger programme of Events
- Groups that can do things get in there and do events and are sustainable, not necessarily five star finish – Under the Dome
- Paintings, Exhibitions

Town Centre Area Action Plan:

- Traffic that passes through that is not going to Whitley Bay –congestion especially Whitley Road / Marden / Park View
- Signage
- Adults cycling on pavements
- Local police – hold to account
- Improvements for pedestrians in Whitley Bay – motorised scooters; cyclists with no lights
- Webcams – increase tourism – see what can be done

Dome:

- Derelict buildings
- Rating with – Lugano
- Town Centre maintenance, block paving, vacant shops, good mix
- Park View unique attraction
- Roads resurfaced – Mayor – Dome resolve
- Former Library / next week 50 place car park
- Bingo site – car park landscaped

(Cait Foley, Engagement Team Table)

- I think we should have a directory to tell people all about the things that are happening in Whitley Bay. It may be that this would need to be on-line and people could print off sections they are interested in and someone would need to keep it up to date.
- Big Local is planning to do that, in their overall plan.
- It would be great to know about all the organisations that operate in Whitley Bay, maybe under 'umbrella' headings.
- It is really important to get the information sharing and communications right.
- We spent quite some time discussing the Big Local initiative as some people around the table were not aware of this.
- We have a real challenge around dereliction of unloved properties in the town.
- It makes sense to me to have one metropolitan area north of the River Tyne instead of what we have now.
- It would be a great idea to get all the groups who want to improve the town together and, perhaps with external facilitation, agree how shared priorities can be agreed and realised.
- It is really important that we manage realistic expectations, especially in terms of relationships when we are working together.
- We should be able to introduce groups to one another to see what can be done from this 'synergy' e.g. St Paul's Bell Ringers and Whitley Women's Choir.
- We need to prioritise what to do first and agree them.
- Can we have a 'splash' in the News Guardian and tell everyone all about these new improvements?
- I think when we share information we should embed 'talking heads' in hyperlinks.
- We need to make sure there are things for everyone to do in Whitley Bay at all times of the day.

(Cllr John O'Shea Table)

- The Dome and what is going to happen with it, the need to keep people up to date with any developments on funding and the importance of this finally being the focus in terms of trying to securing funding and make something happen. We also talked about the importance of linking the sea front / Dome to the town centre so that people "flow" between the two,
- Derelict buildings are a problem – and action on bringing these back into use. One idea was about looking at whether the empty buildings could be charged business rates which might act as an incentive for the owners to do something about them.
- The Town Centre – and the unique shops in Whitley Bay, some concern that the larger shops that have closed.
- Improvements to highways were also discussed.
- When asked if they liked the new format of this meeting, the general view was very positive. Some people thought there were too many items on the agenda, that said people liked finding out about what was going on and felt it was an excellent way of doing this.
- Residents enjoyed the informality of the table discussions.
- Could St Paul's Church be floodlit?

9. Open Floor Questions

There were no additional questions raised at this point.

10. Jam Jar Cinema – Dan Ellis

Cait gave an update and apologies given from Dan who was unable to attend. Jam Jar Cinema is a 42 seat community cinema, situated above Ladbrokes opposite Sainsbury's on Park Road. It opened its doors to the public on 14 September and has proved already to be very popular with local residents and visitors alike. For more information visit the website www.jamjarcinema.com or drop in during their (winter) opening hours Wednesdays 4pm -10pm, Thursdays 11am-10pm, Fridays 4pm -10pm or Saturdays from 11am-10pm.

11. Any Other Business, Thanks and Close

Cllr Graham thanked everyone for coming and said that the next meeting would be a combined meeting with the Mayor's Listening Event in January on 30 January 2014 from 6-8pm at Age UK Centre, Park Road, Whitley Bay, NE26 1LT.