

## DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF DUNSTABLE TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

#### HELD AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, GROVE HOUSE, HIGH STREET NORTH, DUNSTABLE

ON TUESDAY 10TH JANUARY 2006

Present: Councillors A Fairbairn, M Ingham, Miss A Sparrow and N Young (Chairman) (South Bedfordshire District Council), Mrs B Boatwright, P Boatwright, Mrs C Gresham, Mrs S Newton and M Tilley (Vice-Chairman) (Dunstable Town Council) and P Hollick (Bedfordshire County Council)

In Attendance: Mrs S Colbeck (Dunstable Association of Senior Citizens), Mr N Williamson (Dunstable Chamber of Trade), Mr K Eastgate (Market Traders Association), Mr N Reynolds (Quadrant Shopping Centre Manager), with Mr R Walden (Town Clerk), Mrs H Hupton (Deputy Town Clerk) (Dunstable Town Council), Mr J Hoad (Corporate Service Manager-Planning and Economy), Mr D Atkinson (Senior Planner), Mr M Navi (Transport Officer) (South Bedfordshire District Council)

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Mrs P Staples, Mrs C Hegley (Federation of Small Businesses), Mr H Garrod (Dunstable Local History Society), Mr C Clark (AMEY), Mrs P Keene (TIDY), Mr D Hobbs (Dunstable Licensees Association), Mr R Pepworth (Friends of the Earth) and PC D Andrews

#### 1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee held on 25th October 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**RESOLVED:** that Councillor Young be appointed Chairman and Councillor Tilley Vice-Chairman of this Management Committee for the remainder of the current municipal year.

#### 2. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of Dunstable Town Council	Relocation of Pedestrian Crossing	Personal Interest (Town Council ownership of Priory House and possible future management of the Market)
Members of South Bedfordshire District Council	Relocation of Pedestrian Crossing	Personal Interest (District Council owner of properties in Ashton Square and High Street South and Market Authority)

#### 3. DUNSTABLE NORTHERN BYPASS AND LINK ROAD TO BOSCOMBE ROAD EMPLOYMENT AREA

The Committee was pleased to receive County Councillor Tom Wootton (Executive Member for Highways and Waste) and Mr Richard Watts (Head of Environmental Strategy, Policy Development) who discussed with Members the current position relating to the Dunstable Northern Bypass and the proposed construction of a link road from it to the Boscombe Road employment area.

With regard to the Northern Bypass, Mr Watts advised that the Highways Agency's consultation on alternative routes had concluded and an announcement of the preferred route was expected by the end of March, although the junction strategy to be adopted for the Bypass was uncertain at this stage. In its response, the County Council had emphasised the importance of making provision within the Bypass design for a link road to the Boscombe Road employment areas. He further advised of changes to the funding regime for major projects such as the Northern Bypass. These and major schemes included within the Local Transport Plan (LTP) were now subject to a regional funding process. The Government had provisionally allocated £1.1 billion for all such transport schemes in the Eastern Region within the next 10 years but the total cost of all schemes seeking funding was £6 billion. The eastern region considered the Dunstable Northern Bypass as a priority for funding but other schemes at a more advanced stage in the planning process would require £700 million of the regional allocation. There was therefore a possibility that this new regime could lead to a delay in the programme for constructing the Northern Bypass. A final Government announcement on this issue was expected in the spring and, in response to concerns expressed by Members of the Committee at this information, he suggested that any direct approach to the Minister should be deferred until after that announcement. Members did, however, agree to apprise Mr Andrew Selous, MP of the situation.

With regard to the link road to the Boscombe Road employment area, Mr Watts firstly suggested that it maybe helpful if Members could suggest a suitable name for this project in order to avoid current confusion with the Northern Bypass which the Highways Agency was now referring to as the "A5-M1 Link Road". He confirmed that the County Council was committed to the link road project but funding for its delivery was still to be resolved. As a major project it could be subject to the same regional funding process as the Northern Bypass but funding avenues other than the LTP, such as the Government's Growth Area Funding, would need to be explored. For such funding applications to be successful there would need to be a clear rationale and justification for the project. The County Council was accordingly intending to appoint consultants in April to evaluate the currently safeguarded route for the northern section of the A5 Eastern Bypass from Boscombe Road to the Thorn Roundabout, as well as other route options. Members expressed the clear view that, in any evaluation of route options, the potential for reducing traffic within Dunstable Town Centre should be the prime criteria.

During the subsequent debate, Members sought a clearer commitment from the County Council to the link road project to which its representatives reaffirmed that it was seen as crucial to maximising the benefits of the Northern Bypass and the County would be using its best endeavours to deliver the scheme including a commitment to use County Council funding for the evaluation exercise. The current County Council budget setting process has identified the importance of allocating significant sums towards such exercises.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Wootton and Mr Watts for their presentation and looked forward to receiving further information as the project progressed.

With regard to other matters included on the agenda for the meeting the Chairman also asked Councillor Wootton if he could provide information at a later date on the present position for introducing no waiting restrictions in Ashton Square (Middle Row) and advice on how improvements could be undertaken to the raised amenity planting areas in High Street South.

(N.B. Since the Committee meeting the following responses have been received from the County Council on the last two points:

The request for no waiting restrictions in Ashton Square had been added to the list of such requests and would be dealt with as a priority

The priority for County Council highway funding was to improve the condition of footways and carriageways and funding was not available from the County Council for amenity areas. The records showed that responsibility for maintenance lay with the Town Council.)

#### **4. PROPOSED RELOCATION OF PEDESTRIAN CROSSING, HIGH STREET SOUTH**

Since the completion of the A5 Queue Relocation Scheme the Chairman of this Committee and representatives of the local councils had been meeting with officials from the Highways Agency and the Department for Transport (including the Minister) with a view to securing modifications and improvements to the scheme. Whilst the general layout of the scheme had remained unchanged, the Agency had carried out minor modifications to it in response to local concerns.

One of the key modifications requested by the Councils had been the relocation of pedestrian crossings in Church Street and High Street South to safer locations. The Agency had advised that moving the crossing in Church Street was not physically possible but it was willing to consider moving that in High Street South near to Woolworths to a safer position where pedestrians would be less likely to want to cross on the red man signal. A copy of a full review undertaken by the Agency's Agents Carillion-URS was submitted. This review had concluded that it would be possible to relocate the pedestrian crossing some 65 metres further to the south to the north side of The Square. This would allow it to act independently of the A5/A505 traffic lights. The proposed new location of the crossing would provide increased width of road and footpaths so helping to increase visibility and reduce pedestrian congestion. Relocation would also help to reduce both vehicular and pedestrian accidents by up to 0.8 per year. There would, however, be inconvenience to some pedestrians and shop owners along High Street South and Church Street as some pedestrians would adjust their travel patterns to use alternative access. Some shop owners would also be likely to suffer difficulties from the continuous guard rail along High Street South and the need to have access for deliveries to their premises.

The proposal to relocate the crossing to The Square was also linked to changing the programme which controlled the signals at the main crossroads in favour of a vehicle activated system which should considerably reduce traffic queuing in West Street.

The Agency had advised that it was willing to implement the change, provided the local community agreed. After discussion with the Chairman it had accordingly been arranged for a consultation letter to be sent to all businesses in High Street South from Church Street to The Square, Church Street to Church Close, West Street to St Mary's Gate and High Street North to the Quadrant. A summary of responses was submitted which showed that 17 businesses supported the proposal, 9 supported it subject to further comments and 8 businesses opposed the proposal. Members also received a summary of comments collected by South Bedfordshire District Council from its tenants in Ashton Square.

Several respondents had asked for a similar relocation of the West Street crossing and the County Council had advised that this had been referred to its agent, Amey, for investigation.

Mr Met Noyan of Four Seasons Dry Cleaners and Councillor J Anklesaria, on behalf of Vantage Indian Restaurant, addressed the Committee indicating their opposition to the proposals which were perceived to have a potential seriously adverse effect upon their businesses.

Members generally accepted the desirability of relocating the crossing to a more suitable location but felt that the necessary additional railings on both sides of High Street South

would seriously harm the attraction and viability of the town centre. The view was also expressed that the new location would result in longer journeys for some pedestrian movements which would also make the centre less attractive.

**RESOLVED:** i) that the Committee is unable to support the relocation of the pedestrian crossing as proposed in the report

ii) that the Officers be requested to discuss with the Highways Agency alternative solutions to improving pedestrian and vehicular safety in the vicinity of the main crossroads both in the short term and post-Bypass.

## **5. TOWN CENTRE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that, as requested at the last meeting of the Committee, the officers of the relevant partners had reviewed existing measurement data to produce a set of recommended joint measures for evaluating works towards achieving the previously agreed benefits for the work of the Committee as follows:

- improved economic prosperity
- improved services and opportunities for the local community
- a more 'attractive' and 'safer' environment.

**RESOLVED:** i) that the following set of performance indicators be approved:

Annual Footfall Survey  
Annual Trade Survey (to be included in the Town Council's existing survey of local businesses)  
Annual Survey of Local Residents (to be included in the Town Council's existing survey of local businesses)  
Annual Household Survey  
Crime and 'fear of crime' statistics

ii) that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee containing comparisons of existing and new data based on the above indicators.

## **6. FOOTFALL**

Members received a detailed report from the District Council's Policy and Regeneration Service on the results of a pedestrian footfall survey undertaken in the town centre during August and comparing the results with previous surveys since 1991. Overall the survey showed a 24% increase in footfall compared with 2004 which was comparable to the figures recorded in 2002.

**RESOLVED:** that the report be noted.

## **7. TOWN CENTRE MAINTENANCE AND PROMOTIONS**

The Culture and Regeneration Manager submitted a detailed report on recent maintenance and promotional activities in the town centre. The report included the results of a recent meeting with representatives of the Highways Agency relating to various maintenance issues concerning High Street North and High Street South, maintenance and resurfacing works undertaken by the County Council and information from the District Environmental Services Manager.

She also reported on the success of recent promotional events including the Charity Firework Display on 5th November at Bennett Memorial Recreational Ground, the Remembrance Day Celebrations in Priory Gardens on 11th and 13th November, the Tudor Day on 19th November throughout the town centre, the Christmas Tree Carols and Torchlight Procession on 2nd December on The Square, Christmas Entertainment in the Quadrant Shopping Centre during the four weeks preceding Christmas and the series of Lunchtime Recitals on Tuesdays at Grove House during September to December. Members also received details of the Town Council's full promotional programme for 2006 (see Appendix 'A') which included a series of events focussed on Priory House including the continuation of a Tudor Day event. Members were delighted to note what they considered to be a full and exciting programme which would be delivered in consultation and partnership with Town Centre Promotions Group.

- RESOLVED:** i) that Bedfordshire County Council be asked to give urgent attention to the replacement of missing railings at the three pedestrian crossings in Church Street
- ii) that the Culture and Regeneration Manager be thanked for the outstanding quality of the recent town centre Christmas illuminations
- iii) that Members of the Committee be asked to advise the Deputy Town Clerk of any roads they would wish the County Council to consider for re-surfacing in the coming financial year.

## **8. PRIORY HOUSE**

The Committee received a detailed report on the various services provided at Priory House since its official opening on 19th November including the Tourist Information Centre and Gift Shop, promotional events, demonstrations, courses and talks and the operation of the Rose Garden Tea Room.

The second phase of the development, the second floor heritage interpretation displays would be completed in the spring and be formally launched with a second "opening" near Easter.

## **9. PROJECT MATRIX**

The Committee noted the report of other key outstanding issues enclosed at Appendix 'B' but there was insufficient time to consider these important issues. It was therefore agreed that all matters included on the matrix be included as main agenda items for the next meeting of the Committee.