

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 28TH FEBRUARY 2006

Present: Councillors A Fairbairn, M Ingham, Miss A Sparrow, Mrs P Staples 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)

In Attendance: Councillor D McVicar, 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), Mr B Groves (Dunstable College), Mr R Pepworth (Friends of the Earth) with Mr R Walden (Town Clerk), Ms M Alexander (Culture and Regeneration Manager) (Dunstable Town Council), Mr A Lewis (Economic Regeneration Manager) and Mr A Tyson (Parking Manager) (South Bedfordshire District Council)

Apologies for Absence: Councillor P Hollick, Mrs C Hegley (Federation of Small Businesses), Mr H Garrod (Dunstable Local History Society), Mrs P Keene (TIDY), Mr D Hobbs (Dunstable Licensees Association) and PC D Andrews

10 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee held on 10th January 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs Staples	Dunstable Market	Personal Interest (Licensed operator of a market in the Methodist Hall)
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12 HIGH STREET NORTH - QUEUE RELOCATION SCHEME

Members noted a report of the National Audit Office to the Committee of Public Accounts relating to this project. The report was highly critical of the way in which the Highways Agency had unrealistically raised public expectations of the likely outcomes of the scheme, had altered it prior to implementation without adequate local consultation and had failed to adequately consider the impact of the scheme on adjacent highways, particularly the problem of additional rat running in adjoining residential areas. It was understood that Mr Andrew Selous MP would be referring to the issues raised in the report during a House of Commons Adjournment Debate.

13 A5 EASTERN BYPASS

It was noted that, following the expected announcement of the preferred route for the A5/M1 Link (Northern Bypass), the Highways Agency would remove the route protection still currently in place for the A5 Eastern Bypass. Members felt that it was essential that the County Council ensured that the route of the Eastern Bypass would continue to be protected particularly as its northern section provided an obvious route for the scheme now known as Woodside Connection (link from Boscombe Road to Northern Bypass). Councillor McVicar, in his capacity as the relevant Portfolio Holder at the District Council

would shortly be meeting representatives of the County Council to discuss this point and Members were pleased to note that the Chairman of this Committee has been invited to participate in those discussions.

14 SHOP CLOSURES IN THE TOWN CENTRE

At the request of the Town Council the Committee discussed the probable reason for several recent retail shop closures within the town centre and received a paper prepared by Mrs Carole Hegley of the Federation of Small Businesses setting out their views as to the likely causes and actions which might be taken to address those issues. These primarily included the levels of private rents (which were outside the control of the local authorities), car parking facilities and charges (which were to be discussed later in the agenda of the meeting) and the level of business rates. The other prime cause was perceived to be the general levels of traffic congestion which would not be alleviated until the completion of the Northern Bypass.

RESOLVED: that Dunstable Chamber of Trade be encouraged to pursue with the Valuation Office at St Albans reassessments of the rateable value of its members' retail premises in the centre of Dunstable.

15 BUS SHELTERS

The Town Clerk reported that the County Council had agreed with the Town Council a major programme of replacing and upgrading bus shelters in the town over the next five years. The cost of the scheme, including £110,000 in the first year, would be met from the local transport plan budget and from developers' contributions under Section 106 Planning Agreements. Where new shelters could accommodate advertising panels Adshel Ltd would meet future cleaning maintenance and repair costs. Where advertising was not appropriate the Town Council would be responsible for future maintenance.

Representatives from the shelter suppliers and the Town Council would be surveying all sites in the coming month to agree the specifications for each shelter. The Association of Senior Citizens would be consulted on the final list before orders were placed. The Town Council at its meeting on 13th February had decided that all new shelters would be standardised to the same design as the new shelters recently installed on Luton Road. The Senior Citizens Association had previously asked for brick built shelters but the County Council would not agree to this suggestion. The Town Clerk indicated the reasons why the County Council perceived this suggestion to be impracticable. The Association's other request for comfortable seating would however be implemented at an additional cost of £1,000 a shelter in those locations where there was sufficient space to accommodate such seating without obstructing the footway. Where appropriate, all sides would be fitted to accommodate real time bus information.

In the first year, new shelters would be provided in Luton Road, Liscombe Road and three in High Street North, a second landmark shelter would be provided opposite Nicholas Way subject to the Highways Agency agreeing that this could be accommodated within the many underground services in the area and two standard shelters opposite Ashton Middle School and Tavistock Street. A new enclosed shelter would also be provided opposite the Mayfield Road shops. The Town Council had agreed that the heavily vandalised shelter in Meadway would be removed and not replaced.

RESOLVED: that the decision of the County Council to release substantial funds to improve facilities for bus users be welcomed.

16 PEDESTRIAN CROSSING: HIGH STREET SOUTH

The Town Clerk reported that, following the decision taken at the last meeting not to support the relocation of the pedestrian crossing in High Street South near Woolworths, officers of the Town and District Councils had met representatives of the Highways Agency and their consultants URS Carillion. The Agency had agreed to consider introducing an all red phase at the A5/A505 junction with removal of existing crossings close to the junction except in High Street North. This would create possible issues relating to the high kerbs at the junction, the location of railings and the additional traffic congestion which an all red phase would cause.

The Agency was also willing to consider providing a second pedestrian crossing in High Street South near to Priory House but this would still require the provision of additional railings and the Committee remained of the view that this would be unacceptable and asked that this project be therefore not pursued.

The Agency had also agreed to seek funding in 2007/08 for a study into environmental issues in High Street South (which had been outstanding since the Queue Relocation Scheme) including raised flower beds, general pavings, pedestrian crossings, street lighting etc.. It had further agreed to investigate the possibility of removing the narrow "pinch point" of High Street North near the former railway bridge abutment. If removal was feasible this could provide additional road capacity and reduce congestion at the Houghton Road junction.

17 DUNSTABLE MARKET

The Economic Regeneration Team Leader reported that the District Council's Executive Committee on 7TH February had decided to undertake a formal tendering process for the management of the general markets in Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable. This decision was seen as the best way of ensuring the markets received the investment and management needed to maintain them to a high standard and to introduce improvements for customers and traders. It had also been agreed that the two Town Councils would be invited, as part of a formal tendering process, to submit final offers which would be considered alongside private bids.

Members noted and discussed a paper prepared by the Market Traders Association expressing concerns over the possible private management of the market and supporting an alternative proposition that the market service be devolved to the Town Councils. The Committee also discussed its previous preference for the Dunstable Market to be re-located to The Square and how this might be provided for within the current reconsiderations.

RESOLVED: that the District Council be re-advised of this Committee's desire to see the market relocated to The Square, subject to consultation with the market traders.

18 TOWN CENTRE MAINTENANCE

The Culture and Regeneration Manager reported on recent maintenance work undertaken by the town centre team together with details supplied by the District Council's Environmental Service Manager on revised management arrangements within the car parking service team and from the Amey Area Steward on carriageway surfacing works to be undertaken in various streets within the Town Centre during the next three months.

RESOLVED: that the County Council be asked to investigate problems in Tavistock Street caused by commercial operations on the highway and an increasing number of vehicles ignoring the one-way working in this road.

19 TOWN CENTRE CAR PARKS

The Strategy Officer reported on discussions with the Dunstable and District Chamber of Trade concerning aspects of the management and operation of the town centre car parks. These had particularly focused on the possibility of a retailer refund scheme and the balance between parking provision for casual visitors and permit holders.

The Chamber of Trade had proposed a refund scheme whereby participating retailers gave money back to customers spending more than a certain amount in order to offset the parking charges they had incurred. This system required the car park pay and display machines to issue two-part tickets so that the motorist could display one part in the vehicle and give the other to the retailer. It could be introduced in the District Council's car parks when the existing ticket machines were replaced, something that was anticipated for the 2006/07 financial year. Some additional signage in the car parks would be necessary. The cost of the refunds would be borne by the retailers and the Chamber of Trade had agreed to canvass them for support. The District Council's willingness to facilitate such a scheme would depend on the level of retailers support.

The Chamber of Trade had also commented on the balance between parking provision for casual visitors and that for permit holders. When the formal car park management scheme had been devised the District Council had recognised that many town centre businesses and retail premises did not have their own parking spaces and relied on their staff as well as their customers being able to use the public car parks. In some cases these staff needed to use their vehicles during the course of the working day. A permit scheme had been introduced for such people in order to save them from having to pay and display every day and spaces were allocated in each car park exclusively for them (Monday – Friday only). This meant that on occasions all spaces (white bays) available for casual visitors such as shoppers were full and they were unable to park even though some of the permit holder bays (yellow bay) were empty. Committee members acknowledged that car parking management was about compromise and the alternative scenario would be that key staff to a town centre business, having pre-paid for a permit, found that they were unable to park in their usual car park and were delayed because of the time they had to search for an alternative.

- RESOLVED:**
- i) that the Committee support the Chamber of Trade's initiative for a parking refund scheme
 - ii) that the possibility of integrating such a scheme with the private Quadrant Centre car park be considered at the next officers meeting
 - iii) that the District Council be asked to review in particular the balance of permit holder/casual spaces in the West Street car park.

20 TOWN CENTRE PROMOTIONS

The Culture and Regeneration Manager presented a detailed report on the current programme of town centre activities including the launch concert for the new Dunstable Town Band, St George's Day entertainment and the operation of Priory House and the new Tourist Information Centre.

21 PROJECT MATRIX

The Committee noted and reviewed the various matters listed in the project matrix enclosed at Appendix 'A'.

DUNSTABLE TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
PROJECT MATRIX
28TH FEBRUARY 2006

<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>ISSUE</u>	<u>CURRENT POSITION</u>
CCTV	Extension of main town centre system into Quadrant Shopping Centre	To be discussed with Q meeting
'Iceberg Corner' High Street South/Church Street	TIDY request for Councils to purchase to create new public space/promotional area	Beyond DTC powers SBDC has no budget on
Middle Row	Enforcement of parking restriction	County Council has agreed order which will be enforced next review of parking re
Quadrant Public Conveniences improvements	Meeting held with Managers of Quadrant Centre	Dispute between manager SBDC long term position 'station' at Ashton Square toilets. Issue to be explored 14 th March
Grove Theatre	Construction started October 2005 due for completion March 2007	Proposals to incorporate scheme are currently being project contractors.
Performance Indicators	Analysis of current indicators	A detailed report will be