

RURAL FORUM

MONDAY, 4 MARCH 2019

PRESENT: Councillors David Coppinger, Richard Kellaway and Colin Rayner

Also in attendance: Liz Hadden, James Copas, Louise Warbrick, Nick Philp, Paul Rinder, Andrew Randall, Michael Craig, Paul Rinder and Alan Keene

Officers: Helen Murch, David Scott, David Cook and Ian Motuel.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The Vice-Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bateson and Cllr Beer.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

Resolved unanimously: that the minutes of the meeting on 26 November 2018 be approved.

TRAVELLER LOCAL PLAN ISSUES AND OPTIONS PAPER

Ian Motuel, Principal Planner (RBWM) gave a presentation on the Traveller Local Plan Issues and Options Paper. The Forum were informed that the Local Development Scheme (LDS) committed the Council to producing a single issue Traveller Local Plan. The Plan would set out how the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller groups would be met until 2033.

The Forum were informed that there was not one group but a range of people with different histories and cultures that came under the scope, for the purpose of the consultation three types of traveller groups within the Royal Borough had been identified they were; gypsies and travellers, travelling showpeople and boat dweller.

A number of issues had been identified that traveller groups faced these were:

- Travellers facing inequalities and worst outcomes of any groups.
- Most gypsies and travellers stay on permanent, authorised sites but some live on unauthorised sites.
- Travelling showpeople need sites large enough to store their equipment.
- Boat dwellers increasingly use rivers to live on due to housing pressures
- Unauthorised encampments disrupt local community facilities and worsen relationships with settled communities.

The presentation showed a map of existing sites available to travellers within the Royal Borough. The council vision was to “build a borough for everyone – where residents and businesses grow, with opportunities for all”. This included reducing inequalities and reducing tension between communities yet respecting the law and protecting the vulnerable.

The Local Authority had a legal requirement to produce this plan and so far had identified the accommodation needs, published the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) in June 2018, prepared a Sustainability Appraisal Report and had prepared a Traveller Site Assessment Methodology.

The Royal Borough were consulting and seeking advice on the plan and thus had been brought to this forum and the next steps were shown.

In response to question the forum were informed that the sites sought would be mixed use and not just permanent. It was explained the importance of a Section 61 of the CJPOA to direct unauthorised campers to leave the site. They can do this without reference to the courts as well as the use of section 62.

It was noted that it was important to have a transient site to help the use of the legalities mentioned above and to help reduce fly tipping and other harm caused by illegal encampments. The Royal Borough had set aside £85k to protect its own land but more needed to be done for private land.

The Forum discussed what happened when there was an illegal encampment and how each incident had to be treated on its own merits. The council had a legal responsibility to provide sites but also wished to protect the venerable and local communities. It was important to have this policy in place to help support the council's position.

The Forum noted the presentation.

RURAL CRIME

Louise Warbrick informed the Forum about unauthorised encampments statistics for this year within RBWM, with Braywick Park being the only one this year. There had been improved communications between the council and Thames Valley Police. If there was a criminal offense then TVP could use their powers and it would be easier for residents to get support from the police.

It was always better to have prevention measures in place and TVP had worked with the Council on injunctions and worked with other partners to put other measures in place. Although so far the number of crimes reported was low this did not reflect what the farming community were experiencing and it was important that all incidents were reported and crime reference numbers obtained.

Concern was raised about crimes such as hare coursing where participants were showing their activities online and convoys of cars were travelling across Berkshire especially to West Berkshire but nothing was done. It was noted that the police could not access facebook accounts to prosecute such activities.

The Chairman asked if there was any evidence of increased knife crime within the area and was informed that although it was a concern nationally there was little evidence of it becoming an increased issue locally. Knife crime usually was between people who ne each other , one venue had installed a knife arch and metal detectors had been purchased.

Councillor C Rayner mentioned that the way farmer shotgun licences were processed was to be changed and asked if an update could be provided.

The Forum noted the update.

BROADBAND BERKSHIRE

David Scott provided an updated on the superfast broadband project.

The Forum were informed that the Superfast Berkshire programme started in 2011 as part of the Governments initiative to improve broadband coverage in areas where it may not otherwise have been commercially viable for the private sector to provide. The programme was supported by all six Berkshire authorities and by Thames Valley LEP.

The project had now commenced Phase 3 roll out with BT and Cigaclear expanding coverage to 99%. Phase 1 works are complete with any gaps being fed into Phase 2 and 3. Wraysbury and Horton area was being looked at by BT as a commercially viable area.

There had been a delay with Phase 3 whilst BT completed remedial work, both BT and Cigaclear were behind schedule. It was noted that West Berkshire had been ahead of East Berkshire, West Berkshire were also piloting wireless solutions and EE were looking at 4G solutions.

The project team could be contacted via the following email projectteam@superfastberkshire.org.uk.

The Chairman asked if the council made a financial contribution and was informed there had been an initial investment of about £200,000 and annual contributions of £20,000.

The Forum noted the update.

UPDATE FROM THE FARMING COMMUNITY

The Forum received a presentation relating to the farming community. The main points of the discussion included:

- Weather, since November there had been rain and snow with a relatively warm February however a depth it was till dry.
- Commodity prices had been high compared to the previous year.
- New environmental schemes had been introduced and when signed up lasted for five years. More areas covered by native wild grasses were being encouraged.
- There had been three incidents of boundary damage by cars entering fields.
- Brexit – a no deal solution could result in a trade embargo with difficulties exporting products such as lamb. There would also be an increased cost of imports and a reduced workforce.
- It was estimated that 10% of UK greenhouse gases were from agriculture and that farmers managed 71% of the landscape but only 65% was suitable to grow grass.

The Chairman mentioned that as we were not self sufficient in milk production and that 71% of our beef came from Ireland there could be opportunities post Brexit. In response the Forum were informed that this would be counter balanced by the level of red tape and the increased cost of labour. It was expected that there would be a low or no tariff on food so little opportunity.

Cllr C Rayner mentioned that it was difficult to get planning permission for rural worker accommodation.

The update was noted.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no business raised

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The future meeting dates were noted.

The meeting, which began at 5.30 pm, finished at 7.10 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....