

GRAVEHAM RURAL NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

Date Monday, 15 December 2008

Venue: Meadow room, Cobham

Present:

Cllr Mike Snelling (Chairman)

Mrs Carole Baylis - Vigo Parish Council and Vice Chairman

Cllr David Turner (Gravesham Borough Council member Istead Rise and GBC representative)

GBC Cllrs -

+ representatives from all 6 parish councils in Gravesham Rural (see attendance sheet for full list)

Officers present

Will Farmer – Community Liaison Manager KCC

John Britt – Gravesham Borough Council

Doug Finch – Gravesham Borough Council Committee Section

Sue Hill - Gravesham Borough Council Committee Section

David Aspinall Community Delivery Manager - Dartford, Gravesham & Sevenoaks for Kent Highways Services (KHS)

Mr Ray Dines, Transport and Development Manager - Kent Thameside, KHS

Stuart Alford – Gravesham Borough Council

+70 members of public

Apologies for absence:

None

KCC Officers:

		Action
A1.	Welcome – Mr Mike Snelling (Chair)	
	Introduction and welcome by Mr Mike Snelling, Chair of the Forum who introduced Officers and Members of the Forum present, and outlined the purpose of the Forum and discussion topics on each of the table.	
A2.	Apologies	
	None	
A3.	Any Declarations of Interest	
	None	
A4.	Highways maintenance – presentation by David Aspinall, Community Delivery Manager - Dartford, Gravesham & Sevenoaks for Kent Highways Services (KHS) regarding road and highways maintenance and Cheryl Russell, Director of Housing and Environment from Gravesham Borough Council will be speaking on the management of the rural road verges, grass cutting and maintenance issues.	

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	<p>David went through the priorities for KHS in maintaining the roads that are outlined in the local transportation plan and targets set by Government and the Local Area Agreement e.g. to reduce road casualties these being safety, reducing congestion, improving accessibility, air quality. Also mentioned were KHS communication improvements that are planned. The main port of call for highways problems is the KHS contact centre and website. 08458 247800 www.kent.gov.uk/highways. Queries will be given a reference number and KHS will endeavour to respond to these.</p>	
A5.	<p>Highways Schemes- Presentation by Mr Ray Dines, Transport and Development Manager - Kent Thameside, KHS will give a brief overview of Highways schemes</p>	
	<p>There is a £10M budget for the whole of Kent for safety and improvement schemes. Schemes are currently guided by the local transport plan priorities adopted by Kent. Proposals also need to satisfy Government that the money is being spent to fulfil these objectives. There is also a local prioritisation process used by Highways, known as PIPKIN.</p> <p>Stuart Alford of Gravesham Borough Council, Briefly outlined what the section did in terms of road side verge maintenance that is contracted to GBC by KHS</p>	
A6.	<p>Group Sessions: table discussions</p> <p>Summary of table discussions</p> <p>Discussion 1) Ray Dines - Highways schemes – what should the priorities be for deciding which works are carried out by KHS? The tables felt that these should be the priorities for schemes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Safety 2) Accessibility 3) Congestion 4) Air quality <p>Other points raised</p> <p>Consultation and communication– KHS consult with Parish councils, police and community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like more with the Parish Council including local discussion formal and informal • No single point of contact <p>Funding and decision making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would there be funding through the EU? Eg because of operation stack and lorries passing though Kent? • Feel the rural area gets less for their money. • Local budgets to pay for local needs and more local decision making • Notice is taken of Petitions but more needs to be taken of PC's 	

Discussion 2) Highways maintenance

General points were raised about Highways maintenance

- KHS should fulfil Promises
- Contractors need to be more closely supervised
- Potholes and drains – some repairs do not last
- Some take a long time before they are done – target of 1 month, but currently a back-log. Teams should use initiative and fill others in road at same time and use photos to identify rather than markings
- Marking of potholes does not work very well as lines get erased over the time it takes for work to be completed

Road re-surfacing

- Bluebell hill cited as good example of re-surfacing done over 48hours of closure. Needed a lot of parish consultation

Reporting faults

- Better reporting back needed when internet and used to report. There was generally a feeling that nothing happened when reporting to the internet etc.
- Works left for a long time undone

Utilities

- Permit system and penalties being introduced to reduce delay in completion
- Re-digging up of roads

Other specific issues raised

- Some roads in Fairseat are very poor
- Decisions on speed limits – who makes these?
There is a national review of speed limits on all roads. KHS has been tasked by government to review speed limits on roads over the next few years.
- Sole St/Cobham is a rat run/short cut – with speeding cars
- Use of Parish Plans – parish plans (e.g. Cobham) to help inform of priorities – these are not fed into KHS priorities at the moment
- Flooding in Sole Street – nothing has happened
- Southfield Shaw – Vigo/Culverstone – a crossing problem – needs a pavement on other side of road
- Heron Hill Lane – valley lane – quality of road
- Many people wanted to talk more about the A227 and discuss this more – many did not know of JTB decisions - a lack of awareness of the JTB meeting. Problems with A227 including lorries and speeding traffic

Discussion 3) Grass verge maintenance

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- Flailing on Wrotham Road – Frequency not high enough
- Sole Street – Debris left at edge of the road after land owners have cut the hedges and also detritus in road along paved sections – **KHS dealing with debris from hedge cutting under highway safety**
- Top of Newlands Lane – Tree dumped on verge has never been cleared – **The tree has been removed by GBC and the grass trimmed. This area is on the rural flail so is due to be cut twice per year.**
- Conifer Drive – Verge next to No. 2 from White Post Lane is in a disgusting state.- **We will be cutting this back in the next couple of week and will add to the rural flail list**
- No flailing is ever carried out in White Post Lane – **See point 4**
- White Post Lane/Mountfield – Access points to Culverstone recreation ground overgrown; why are they not checked regularly? **These areas have been cut back and the leaves cleared. We will do this job at least twice per year.**
- Wrotham Road verge past Hope Hill – Frequency not high enough and it always looks a state and sight lines are dangerous. Also there is a disparity between the standard of cut here to the standard on the Wrotham Road from A2 out to Istead Rise.
- Re-introduction of “Length” men to carry out minor maintenance works on rural roads such as cutting back trees from the signs and cutting out channels in the verges to aid surface water run off.
- Norwood Lane – Complaint regarding the flailing and the fact that it is dangerous due to blind bends. **This road had an extra cut this year due to highway safety**
- Road junctions in Cobham – Please can additional priority be given to sight lines in the area.
- Churchyard grass cutting – can we cut more frequently as this would mean we would get round quicker and it wouldn’t take any longer. Nurstead Church was mentioned in particular.
- Parking on verges in Meopham and Shorne were mentioned – Can the cars / lorries be issued with tickets?
- Can we box off our grass clippings? **We do not box off clippings**
- Higham verges – they are not cut every 3 weeks **We will monitor this during the next cutting season**
- Can we publicise the cutting dates or sites that get 3 weekly cut and those that get twice yearly cuts? Website / Your Borough.
- Gravesham Council Tax Workshops – A cost saving mechanism of reducing the grass cutting frequency in order to save money had been proposed; there was universal agreement that they didn’t want to see this happen.
- Harvel grass cutting please can the litter can be picked from the verges after the flailing takes place – **This point has been taken on board and we will aim to do this next year**
- Cobhambury Hill – Has the verge been cut with wildlife in mind and what are we doing to promote wildlife in the verges – We are working in partnership with Kent Wildlife Trust who advise us on cutting times and heights to actively encourage wildflowers.
- Leaves in Pear Tree Lane are dangerous and need to be swept

Need to:-

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve Communication • Members of the Pubic would like more information with regard to when and how often the grass will be cut • Members of the Pubic would like more information with regard to what is Borough and what is County responsibility • Implement Service Level Agreements? • Cut Nurstead Church more frequently 	
A7.	Summary of table discussions: Brief feedback from each of the tables	
A8.	Question time - general questions regarding GBC, KCC or Parish Services to Members and Officers present	
	<p>Q. Will next years budgets (for KCC and GBC) be adversely affected by credit crunch?</p> <p>A. yes, less interest from reserves etc, less fees from planning applications, less money coming in from Council tax, less parking income are some of the impacts.</p>	
A9.	Future Discussion Topics: Brief discussion on topics to consider at future meetings.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transport • Who does what in local government – a family tree • Green belt and conservation areas –the planning rules 	
A10.	Date of next meeting	
	31st March 2009 –Meopham secondary school	