STAMFORD LOCAL AREA ASSEMBLY

Minutes of the MEETING of the STAMFORD LOCAL AREA ASSEMBLY held at 7.00pm on Thursday 22nd September 2005 at Stamford Town Hall.

PRESENT:

Councillor Ray Auger in the Chair
South Kesteven District Council

Lincolnshire County Councillors
Councillor Colin Helstrip
(Stamford West)
Councillor Thomas M Trollope-Bellew
(Stamford Rural)

SKDC Councillors
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing*
Councillor David Brailsford
Councillor Frances Cartwright
Councillor Bob Conboy
Councillor Joyce Gaffigan
Councillor Maureen Jalili*
Councillor Andrew Moore
Councillor Bob Sandall*
Councillor Azar Woods*
*also representing Stamford Town Council

Stamford Town Council
Councillor John Judge (Mayor)
Councillor Maureen Riley
Councillor Peter Stearn

Tenant Compact Representatives
Councillor Ray Lee (Compact South)*
Maurice Bloodworth (District Compact)

Stamford Chamber of Trade
Neil Scholes

Stamford YMCA
Heath Monaghan

Warren Keep Residents’ Association
Ann Sutherland

SKDC Officers
John Pell (Director of Community Services)
Chris Sharp (Corporate Manager HR)
Garry Knighton (Head of Waste & Contract Services)
Dawn Temple (Recycling Officer)
1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mark Ashbury (Stamford Town Council), Councillor Terl Bryant (SKDC and Stamford Town Council), Catherine Hammant (Stamford Vision), Mrs Mary Patrick (Vice Chair District Compact), and Councillor George Waterhouse (SKDC).

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Stamford LAA and advised that he intended to impose a guillotine and close the meeting at 9.30pm.

2. **Minutes of the Meeting – 19th May 2005**

Subject to recording Catherine Hammant’s apologies for absence, the minutes of the meeting held on 19th May 2005 were agreed as a correct record.

3. **Public Forum**

(1) **Question from Mr George Gough**

Mr Gough referred to a trust fund of £5 million which had been bequeathed to the town for playgrounds. He asked why nothing had been done with this money and what interest had accrued.

The Mayor of Stamford, Councillor Judge replied that Mr Gough was referring to the Skells Trust of which the Stamford Town Councillors were the Trustees. He explained that anyone could apply for a grant from the trust subject to meeting the necessary criteria for funding. Applications would be considered by the Town Council at a special Skells Trust meeting. Councillor Stearn corrected that the amount left in the will was nothing like the £5 million Mr Gough had quoted. In fact it had been around £70,000 when the Trust had been established in the 1960’s. The fund earned approximately £40,000 per year which was available for grant award. Councillors Bisnauthsing and Wood gave examples of local projects which had benefited from funding and these were not limited just to recreation areas. Local churches and community groups had been awarded grants in the past. Councillor Judge explained that application forms were available from the Town Clerk who could advise on the rules of the Trust and provide information on the current interest earned on the Trust’s funds. Mr Gough indicated he was satisfied with the response he had received.

[The Chairman advised the meeting that he had received a letter from Mr Johnson of Austin Street, Stamford, but that he would respond to the author at a later stage.]
4. **Hospital Provision in Stamford**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mandy Renton, General Manager of Peterborough & Stamford Hospitals NHS Trust and her colleague Mr Bill Stevenson. The LAA had previously requested a representative from the Hospitals Trust to attend the meeting to answer questions of local concern.

Mandy Renton gave a short presentation to the meeting in which she outlined the range of services and facilities provided at Stamford hospital, how well they were used, and the specialties which took place in the operating theatre and procedure room. The meeting heard that over 3,600 procedures were carried out at the hospital each year. However, surgical procedures in the NHS were facing significant change with more emphasis on day care procedures as the norm. There was also greater use of technical solutions for surgery which were less invasive and this contributed to the rapid pace of change over the last five years. Stamford hospital’s outpatient department dealt with almost 22,500 appointments a year – nearly half of all appointments in the South West Lincolnshire PCT area. The emergency care facility had dealt with some 9,500 minor injuries in 2004/05 yet had managed to reduce waiting time for treatment dramatically.

Mandy then gave an overview of the hospital estate and what areas were in use. The west end of the estate was no longer in use for patient care. The Trust was currently exploring a number of possibilities for good uses of the unused parts of the estate which would be of benefit to the local community. A workshop was to be set up to explore these proposals and she extended an invitation to anyone interested in becoming involved to contact her after the meeting. She closed her presentation by stating that the Trust was facing a lot of challenges in the future; it needed to be sufficiently flexible in order to respond to the demands of the PCT who were developing services themselves in order to provide health care closer to patients’ homes.

The Chairman invited questions from the floor.

The main issue of concern from both members of the public and LAA members was the recent closure of the Hurst ward at Stamford hospital. Reference was made to the demand in the past on this ward for elderly patients during the winter months and Mandy Renton was asked how the hospital intended to cope if there was a surge in demand for beds and whether there was a possibility that, in those circumstances, the ward would be re-opened.

Mandy explained that the demand for beds had decreased following the changes in the provision of health care practices she had previously mentioned. The Hurst ward had been considerably under utilised and this could not continue as it would have been a gross abuse of tax payers money. She stated she did not expect the Hurst ward to be re-opened as it was near impossible to provide the necessary staffing. However, the hospital had the flexibility within its services to meet a surge in demand.

This explanation was met with dissatisfaction and Mandy was asked if the Trust was aware of the strength of feeling in the town and surrounding area over this
issue. Mandy replied that she and her colleagues were well aware of this and that none of the decisions had been made lightly but were made quickly in response to the situation across all three Trust sites. She reiterated that demand for beds had declined due to changes in the provision of health care practices; the average length of stay for emergency patients had dropped significantly over the whole Trust area as better support was available for them in their homes. If the Trust needed to have beds available because of a surge in demand, it had a duty to provide them.

Mandy also responded to other questions concerning some services which were no longer available on the Stamford site such as treatment for hearing loss and podiatry, national NHS targets, and the implications for funding arising from the reconfiguration of the Primary Care Trusts. The Chairman closed what had been a lengthy debate and thanked Mandy and her colleague for their attendance.

5. Consultation on proposed changes to the Waste Collection service

The Chairman introduced Mr Garry Knighton, Head of Waste and Contract Services and Mrs Dawn Temple, Recycling Officer from SKDC.

Garry Knighton gave a presentation to the assembly on proposed changes to the waste collection service in order to enable the authority to reach its statutory targets for recycling from the waste stream. The District Council was now embarking upon a period of consultation in order to find out residents’ preferences over:

- Refuse collection containers – bags or wheeled bins
- Recycling collection containers – boxes or wheeled bins

and to discover the public’s choice between the two following options:

- Option 1: continue with black bag and box with an alternative fortnightly collection to include side waste.
- Option 2: wheeled bin collection on alternative weeks with no side collection.

Under each option, he outlined the future recycling predictions. The meeting was advised that other local authorities were being approached and visited to understand their workings, and to learn how they have overcome some problems and issues. With many authorities adopting variations of all of the above, consultations with them will highlight possible difficulties for the future. Mr Knighton also made reference to health and safety implications for the refuse collection crews: there is an onus on the Council to consider the potential risks to collection staff using both bags and boxes. Research is being conducted by the Health and Safety Executive to identify the actual risks, and the results, once available, will need to be considered in the long-term.

The Chairman invited those present to put any questions to Mr Knighton.

A question was raised that, in the event that the preference was for wheeled bins, would there be any circumstances in which the existing black sacks would still be used. Mr Knighton replied that he was not aware of any authority who had gone
down the wheeled bin route who had 100% coverage; there would always be certain types of properties such as flats where this would not be practical and an exception would have to be made. A member of the Stamford Town Council commended Mr Knighton on the quality of the existing weekly black sack service and expressed concern at the proposal to change to alternate weekly collections under a wheeled bin scheme, suggesting that this would be retrograde step. Mr Knighton replied that if refuse was stored correctly there should be no problem with rats and maggots; the ethos behind alternate collections was to encourage people to think more carefully about their household waste and to put more effort into recycling. Mr Knighton later reiterated this point in response to an assertion that the amount recycled was not related to the type of receptacle used.

A question was asked about the consultation process and whether the outcome would be dependent upon a vote by residents. Mr Knighton explained that the views expressed by residents would be considered by the District Council’s Cabinet who would take these into account in making the final decision.

During his presentation, Mr Knighton had stated that the existing Saturday collection of waste generated by the Friday market was to cease. The Stamford Town Councils representatives expressed concern at this decision and asked why there had been no prior consultation on this. They were advised that this was not a service provided by the District Council but an activity that had been undertaken by the County Council. A final question from a member of the public concerned why there was no door to door glass collection. Acknowledging that to do so would not be cheap, she asserted that recycling should not solely be about cost. Mr Knighton replied that the existing Bring sites were well used for glass recycling. It was a fact that most of the waste glass was green glass which originates from abroad. A key consideration with recycling was what could be done with the end product; clear glass had been used in road aggregate. To ship the used green glass back to its origin would be extremely expensive.

In conclusion, Mr Knighton sought the views of the LAA members on which of the two options they would prefer. A show of hands indicated a slightly greater preference for option two.

It was agreed:

(1) Mr Knighton and Mrs Temple be invited to a future meeting to discuss problems with litter and enforcement issues;
(2) The District Council’s Cabinet take into consideration the Stamford LAA’s preference for Option 2 for future waste collection arrangements.

6. Local Development Framework- Issues and Options Paper

The Council's Director of Community Services, Mr John Pell referred to a detailed document “Issues and Options for future development in South Kesteven” which had been circulated at the meeting. This was the first significant document in draft form for public consultation on the new Local Development Framework which would replace the existing South Kesteven Local Plan.
He urged those present to take this document away with them to read. At the next LAA, the Council’s senior planning officer would be available to respond in detail to questions. Attention was drawn to the dates of the public exhibitions, the one in Stamford being held on 3rd and 4th October 2005.

It was agreed to note the circulation of the document and consider this in more detail at the next LAA meeting.

7. County, District and Parish Intentions for the 2006/07 Budget

The Chairman advised due to the length of the agenda, this item would be deferred to the next meeting.

8. Equalities & Diversity

The Corporate Manager for Human Resources, Mr Chris Sharp introduced himself to the meeting and explained that an additional duty he undertook was to be the responsible officer for equality and diversity issues. The purpose of his presentation was to give an overview of what the Council was doing in this area and the challenges it faces.

Equality and diversity was an increasingly important aspect of what the Council carries out as, fundamentally, it was a people business. It therefore made sense to treat all its citizens with equal importance. No one should receive a lower standard or have reduced access to a service because of their race, ethnicity, sex, religion, sexual orientation, age, or economic status. There was a significant business case for equalities as the Council was one of the major employers in the district with 700 staff and also a large service provider. Mr Sharp acknowledged that prejudice and stereotyping was a fact of life and it often happened in subtle, covert way – hidden apart from those who experienced it. The Council must take a lead on this issue as equal treatment did not occur naturally; assumptions and stereotyping led to unfairness and poor decision making. He went on to outline the economic, legal, security, moral, and social reasons for keeping this issue at the forefront and explained there were three aspects to equalities: equal opportunity, equal access and equality of outcomes.

He concluded by explaining that the Council was in the process of developing its customer contact centre and part of this process involved gathering information about the Council’s customers. This data would be used to help review its services and establish a multi-cultural consultation forum. Work was ongoing in terms of training for members and staff and the development of a racial incident reporting process.

A question was raised about positively promoting multi-culturalism within the democratically elected council members, particularly the executive decision making body. Mr Sharp commented that the Council had become more culturally diverse and therefore was quite healthy in those terms, particularly by comparison with
many other local authorities. Mr Sharp was thanked for his informative presentation.

9. Leisure Trust

Mr Pell informed the meeting that at the start of September, the Council’s Cabinet considered a report on the viability of transferring the management of the Council’s cultural services into a leisure trust. The Council had employed consultants to look at the various options for not for profit organisations to operate its leisure and arts centres and other facilities such as parks and recreation areas. Mr Pell explained that leisure trusts were already in existence in other parts of the country and cited examples such as the Nottingham Play House, the Nottingham Ice Arena and the Northampton Theatre who were operated and managed under such arrangements.

The Council was now undertaking a process of consultation to seek the views of interested parties and the LAA’s.

The meeting was told that there were significant benefits, particularly financial ones, through business rate relief and VAT advantages from operating a trust arrangement. Leisure trusts were also better placed than local authorities to draw down funding from external sources such as the National Lottery. Advice had been sought from trusts set up elsewhere on the advantages and disadvantages. One of the real benefits was that the members of the trust board could also influence and be much more involved at a local level. If the Council pursued this route, there was also the option whether to have one large trust or a number of smaller trusts that were bespoke to a particular area. Mr Pell asked the members of the LAA whether they felt there was enough local interest to make a trust viable.

One of the Stamford Town Councillors stated that she had heard talk of turning the Stamford Arts Centre into a trust but there were wide implications to be considered. She expressed concern that the Arts Centre should not lose out. The benefits of a trust had been emphasised by the officer but there were also disadvantages to this arrangements. Further concerns were raised on whether savings could be re-invested into the centres and if in fact the trust option was a way for the authority to pass on a loss making service and walk away from its commitment to the Stamford Arts Centre. Mr Pell stated that view could be countered with the benefits from the degree of autonomy and independence enjoyed by trust status. The view was put forward that this was a complex issue which had major implications for the town given that the Stamford Arts Centre was a cultural flagship which enjoyed not only a regional but national reputation. The officer was asked to bring back to the LAA a more detailed presentation on how such a trust would operate, particularly in terms of the Arts Centre and the implications for an improved leisure centre for the town. Mr Pell undertook to arrange this and drew members’ attention to the fact that a summary of the consultants’ report was available to download from the Council’s website.
It was agreed that a more detailed presentation be brought before the LAA at a future meeting on how a leisure trust arrangement would be formed and operate to benefit the town’s leisure and cultural facilities.

As it had now passed 9.30pm, the Chairman reminded those present of his intention to close the meeting. There were still a number of items remaining on the agenda that had been identified by the Town Council as issues for consideration. The Chairman stated he could give a brief status report on each or carry them over to a future meeting.

This was met with strong concern being voiced by the Town Councillors who felt that it had been over ambitious to fit this lengthy agenda into two and a half hours. The Chairman was asked why the issues of concern to the Town Council and local residents not been tabled at the start. Although the officer presentations had been informative and useful there was now no time to debate the other matters. A Town Councillor referred to the dwindling attendance by the public and suggested that by not allowing debate on their concerns had effectively discouraged public participation. Other comments were made about the lack of publicity for these meetings and agenda content. A suggestion was made that the agenda could be published in the Stamford Mercury on the Friday preceding the meeting as the local newspaper was widely read by residents.

10. Date, time and venue of next Meeting

The next meeting of the Stamford LAA was scheduled to take place at 7pm on Thursday 2\textsuperscript{nd} February 2006 at the Stamford Town Hall.

The meeting formally closed at 9.45pm

APPENDIX TO MINUTES:

Update on issues previously raised by the Stamford Town Council as listed on the agenda:

(1) New Licensing laws and implementation/impact on Stamford town centre.

This would be considered at a meeting of the SKDC Community Development and Scrutiny Panel (DSP) to be held at the Town Hall in Stamford at 10.00am on 10\textsuperscript{th} November 2005. All Members of the Public were welcome to attend.

(2) Council Housing Stock Transfer

This would also be considered at the DSP meeting on 10\textsuperscript{th} November.
(3) Leisure Centre for Stamford

This had been covered in minute 9 above

(4) Article 4 Direction for Stamford Conservation Area

An Article 4 Direction is a restriction on development that can be placed by local planning authorities (such as SKDC) on non listed buildings within conservation areas, such as exists in Stamford.

(5) The place of the Town Council as a consultative body for Stamford

(6) Stamford Town Council or Stamford Vision – who should have the authority to make changes in Stamford, elected members or non elected members.

The following written response from Catherine Hammant of Stamford Vision had been circulated at the meeting:

Stamford Vision believe that there is a case for both organisations to work both together and separately towards their mutual goal which is the positive improvement of the town for the benefit of its people. We can see that there are occasions where one or other organisation might be the appropriate lead in implementing improvements but by having both groups a wider range of initiatives can be embraced.

All tiers of government have encouraged partnership working, in particular with the private sector. It is our experience that there is strength in acting as a broad based local partnership. Stamford Vision currently has an active core of 50 volunteers representing not only the three levels of local government but also the private sector, voluntary, educational and community organisations.