**BOROUGH OF KETTERING**

**RURAL FORUM**

**Meeting held: 26th November 2015**

**Present:** Borough Councillors

Councillor Jim Hakewill (*Chair*)

Councillor David Howes

Councillor Mark Rowley

 County Councillors

 Councillor Christopher Groome

 Councillor Allan Matthews

 Parish Councillors

Councillor David Watson (Geddington, Newton & Lt. Oakley)

Councillor Angela Beardsmore (Braybrooke)

Councillor Hilary Bull (Broughton)

Councillor Pat Scouse (Broughton)

Councillor David Whalley (Great Cransley)

Councillor Katharine Cadbury (Harrington)

Councillor Carl Ward (Loddington)

Councillor Andrew Macredie (Pytchley)

Councillor Bruce Squires (Stoke Albany)

Councillor Frances Pope (Thorpe Malsor)

Councillor Ian Busby (Warkton)

Councillor James Woolsey (Warkton)

Councillor Nick Richards (Wilbarston)

Councillor Georgina Royce (Wilbarston)

 Bernard Rengger (Chair of Sutton Bassett PM)

**Also Present:** Lisa Hyde (Kettering Borough Council)

Sue Lyons (Kettering Borough Council)

Brendan Coleman (Kettering Borough Council)

Rob Harbour (Kettering Borough Council)

 David Pope (Forum Administrator-KBC)

 Paul Bimson (British Telecommunications)

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|  |  | **Actions** |
| **15.RF.35** | **APOLOGIES**Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matt Tartaglia, Toni Wilkins, Brian Peel (Weekley); Bill Archer and Paul Wharin (Warkton); Sally McKeown (Ashley); Richard Barnwell (Cransley/Mawsley); Peter Hooton (Rushton), Marie Jessop (Braybrooke) and Robin Shrive (Broughton) |  |
| **15.RF.36** | **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**None |  |
| **15.RF.37** | **MINUTES****RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Rural Forum held on 17th September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of Cllr Matthews apologies | **DJP** |
| **15.RF.38** | **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**Future Format of the Rural ForumCouncillor Watson advised the forum that he had held a telephone conversation with Danny Moody of NCALC which he considered to be unconstructive. He noted concern regarding whether the views of the forum were taken into account at Borough level. He stated that a number of challenges had been set to test how KBC thought about the forum, including extending invitations to the Chief Executive, Leader and Finance Portfolio Holder to attend future meetings of the forum. He considered that although the forum had attempted to alter the way it operated, little in the way of feedback was being received from council officers. Cllr Richards stated his disappointment that there appeared to be little coordinated reaction by the council to the general feeling of the forum over the previous two meetings. The Chair stated that the Leader of the Council had declined an invitation to a meeting of the forum as he had every confidence in the abilities of the Rural Portfolio Holder, Councillor David Howes. The forum was advised that the way the meeting was resourced had been made clear to members and that it was not necessary for the Chief Executive to attend. Issues raised by the forum were taken back for consideration by senior officers. It was noted that an issue regarding Solar PV panels raised at the previous forum meeting had been taken to the Executive Committee and then referred to Planning Policy Committee who had committed to undertake a piece of work on the topic. The forum heard that this was a clear example of the forum instigating a piece of work that would be picked up and actioned. LSP ConferenceThe Chair advised that he had attended the LSP Conference on behalf of the forum in place of Councillor Richard Barnwell.Street-lightingThe Chair advised the forum that a meeting had been held with county councillors representing the Borough, alongside David Farquhar from NCC. The aim of the meeting had been to establish what would happen to streetlights in rural areas in future and the practical and financial implications for rural lighting. The Chair provided the following information that had arisen from the meeting:- * NCC was the only Highway Authority in the county and had a responsibility to light highways to a suitable standard for the safety of users. This did not include community lighting.
* At its formation in 1974, KBC had picked up the operation and maintenance of street-lighting in various rural areas. No written records could be located between NCC and KBC to state that KBC was a lighting authority.
* There remained an issue in identifying responsibility for street lights. During NCC’s street light switch-off, a small number of lights had been switched off in rural areas.
* Parishes could fulfil the role of lighting authority, although there were none in the Borough and few across the county. In other villages precepts had been levied since 1974 to pay for maintenance.
* NCC had no requirement to provide lighting in villages, with the exception of specific lights in Broughton.
* Should a village wish to have streetlights upgraded there would be a significant sum involved in replacing lights to NCC standards, with an additional maintenance payment required in perpetuity.
* Should NCC control the lights, they could choose to switch them off in future.
* In 2012, NCC had written to both KBC and all parish councils to advise that Balfour Beatty had the street-lighting contract and asking whether parishes wished to form part of this contract. There had been no response from parishes in relation to that letter.

Brendan Coleman, Head of Environmental Care Services advised the forum that KBC were attempting to unpick a number of historical issues in relation to street-lighting. NCC as a Highway Authority was automatically a street-lighting authority. Borough and Parish councils could be designated as lighting authorities, although legislation allowed for the designation to be handed back. Across the county, the majority of parishes were responsible for their own lighting. KBC had provided funding in the past for maintenance and small-scale lamp replacement, although it was noted that these actions did not make KBC responsible for lighting as this was not possible without taking on the designation as a lighting authority. KBC had never had a programme for wholesale lighting column replacement. If NCC was to maintain all street-lighting there was a risk that any or all lights could be switched off in future. The meeting heard that KBC had tried to move the issue forward; every light in the district had been mapped, with all parishes responding to information requests. This information had been shared with NCC. The decision for parishes was whether to part with funding towards the cost of street-lighting. NCC had written to parishes to ascertain whether they wished to be included under their countywide Balfour Beatty contract, although their preferred option was for parishes to take care of their own lighting. KBC had and would continue to provide small scale funding to support street-lighting in rural areas, subject to normal budgetary reviews. Brendan concluded by noting that he was happy to facilitate group meetings with NCC and the parishes to decide how best to proceed. The forum stated that the parishes would not volunteer for change, with certain parishes vehemently against the principle of maintaining their own street-lighting. For certain parishes, replacement and maintenance costs could approach £150k given the number of lighting columns involved and parishes were unwilling to consider adding to their precept to pay for such upkeep.Brendan Coleman reiterated that if a light was located on a road then it would be county responsibility as part of highway safety because neither KBC or the parishes were designated lighting authorities. He again offered to facilitate further discussion with NCC colleagues to reach a decision going forward. Brendan confirmed that NCC would only adopt street-lighting of a certain standard and confirmed that although KBC provided some funding towards maintenance of existing rural lighting, it would take more funding than KBC could provide to maintain them to adoptable levels. The Chair asked for forum representatives to discuss the matter with their parishes and that the topic would be added to the agenda for the forum meeting of 4th February 2016 to better understand how to resolve the situation. He concluded by stating that the issue would be raised with KBC’s cabinet to make them aware of what was clearly a delicate issue for all involved.  | **BC****BC****DJP** |
| **15.RF.39** | **MEMBERS OF PUBLIC PRESENT WHO REQUESTED TO SPEAK**None |  |
| **15.RF.40** | **BROADBAND ROLLOUT**Paul Bimson, BT’s Regional Partnership Director for the East Midlands attended the meeting and provided details of the ongoing superfast fibre broadband rollout as previously requested by the forum.The meeting heard that 80% of UK residents and business had access to superfast broadband speeds, with the government keen for that figure to rise to 95% by the end of 2017. BT had been rolling out new technology for some time, working alongside a number of public sector partners including Northamptonshire County Council. An initial contract had been signed with the county council in March 2013 to provide access to 90% of businesses and residents, a target that had been achieved four months earlier than planned. A new contract had been agreed to extend this coverage still further in harder to reach areas of the county. This second contract was in the planning phase and would impact a number of communities in the Borough, with an anticipated end date of late 2017. Details of current available technologies were provided to the meeting, who noted that existing speeds of 80MB/s could soon be exceeded based on trial technology being tested in the region. As a result of having an open access network, any service provider could access the technology installed by BT Openreach which in turn was driving down costs to consumers.It was noted that discussions were routinely held with housing developers regarding technological installations as part of any new development as it was easier and cheaper to undertake this work at the commencement of building rather than attempt a retrofit at a later date. For areas that were not covered under the NCC scheme, communities could investigate part-funding in order to bring superfast broadband to their village, with Ashley having already done this. If there were properties identified that were too expensive to connect, the government would be introducing a voucher scheme that would allow residents to apply for a satellite internet service. The forum was advised that the further information on the broadband rollout could be obtained from the websites listed below:-[www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net](http://www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net)[www.communityfibre.bt.com](http://www.communityfibre.bt.com)[www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/where-and-when/](http://www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/where-and-when/)The forum thanked Mr Bimson for his attendance and presentation.  |  |
| **15.RF.41** | **GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS**Rob Harbour, Head of Planning, attended the meeting to provide a presentation on the subject of Gypsies and Travellers in relation to planning and planning policy matters. This item had been requested for inclusion on the agenda at the previous forum meeting. The meeting heard that 27 pitch applications had been made during 2015, starting in January at Woodside near Desborough. Two further applications had been determined in June; The Paddocks near Braybrooke and Old Willows near Broughton. In October a whole Planning Committee meeting had been dedicated to determining Gypsy and Traveller applications, nine at the Greenfields, Braybrooke site and another near Broughton. Out of all the applications received, a total of 12 pitches had been approved. Another recent application for an additional plot at Greenfields was working through the planning process.The net result of the 12 approvals was to ensure the Borough had a five year supply of sites which in turn provided the Planning Committee with a significant material consideration when determining future applications and could also be taken into account by planning inspectors during any potential appeals. The forum was advised that the council would need to identify and provide for an additional two pitches every year in order to retain a five year supply, starting from April 2016. This would require future policy development in order to allocate sites. The forum was reminded about previous site allocation work that had been undertaken in recent years, with initial assessment of 165 sites, which had gradually been reduced to 38 worthy of more detailed assessment and public consultation. There had been a huge turnout at consultation events and a high number of representations had been received. From the initial number of sites, two potential sites (Highcroft Farm, Broughton and Junction 4 of the A14) had been identified with work still ongoing in relation to their viability. The forum was provided with a timetable for completion of the work, noting that further pre-submission consultation was scheduled for Summer 2016. The Joint Core Strategy (JCS) would be in place to back up such work, and it was important to ensure that the JCS had been examined and stood a good chance of being adopted by North Northants authorities. It was hoped that the council could adopt the Local Plan Part Two document by Summer 2017. The government had commissioned a review into planning policy processes as they had become increasingly unwieldy and time consuming. Recent changes to policy were outlined, with the forum noting that in August 2015 there had been an alteration to planning policies for travellers’ sites and the exact definition of a traveller. The aim of these changes was to strengthen protection of greenbelt land as well as reducing unauthorised occupation of land. Under the changes, if a site was intentionally occupied without permission and then retrospective planning was sought, the unauthorised occupation would become a material planning consideration.The forum heard that the Housing and Planning Bill was currently going through Parliament, Clause 84 of which considered assessment of accommodation need. Currently there was a duty to undertake separate needs assessments for Gypsies and Travellers. There was a plan to remove that duty from local authorities and to have one unified assessment of all housing accommodation need in the Borough. This alteration could potentially affect the requirement for the Council to maintain five year supply of sites in future.  |  |
| **15.RF.42** | **SOLAR PV FARMS**It was noted that the issue of roof-mounted Solar PV panels raised at the previous forum meeting had been taken to the October meeting of the Executive Committee that had referred the topic to the Planning Policy Committee. At the meeting held on 4th November, the Planning Policy Committee had committed to undertake a piece of work, the outcome of which would be returned to the forum upon completion. | **RH** |
| **15.RF.43** | **THE ROLE OF THE RURAL PORTFOLIO HOLDER**Councillor David Howes, the Rural Portfolio Holder provided the forum with a brief outline of his role as requested by the Rural Forum.He stated that following election in 2013 he had been a member of the Rural Forum with a cabinet position being created four months previously to support rural areas on issues such as Gypsies and Travellers, transport, broadband and the development of diversity of business in rural areas. He noted that the key aspect of his role was the proliferation of broadband in rural areas.In relation to Gypsies and Travellers, approximately 80% of the Borough’s population were resident within the Welland ward. As noted earlier, KBC were in a stronger position as a result of having a five year supply of sites. In addition, a Joint Gypsy and Traveller Community Group had been created which had political support across the border in Daventry. Conversations had also been held with the Leader of Harborough District Council to see whether they wished to become involved in the project, the key purpose of which was to aid and support a framework which allowed for the provision and good management of sites and services for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. A full copy of the objectives of the group is attached at **Appendix A.**Councillor Howes concluded by noting that having a rural background he believed passionately in rural affairs and considered that it was important for the Rural Forum to continue. He further stated that his role allowed for rural issues raised at the forum to be heard at cabinet level for the first time. He asked the forum to be clear what areas they wished to receive cabinet feedback on.  |  |
| **15.RF.44** | **POLICE STATISTICS**The Police Statistics supplied as Item 12 were noted. |  |
| **15.RF.45** | **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**The following items were noted for future meetings of the Forum:-* Street-lighting (February)
* Budget (February)
* Police Statistics (February)
* Fly-tipping
* Truck Stops
* Feedback from Core Spatial Strategy Inspectors’ Visit
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| **15.RF.46** | **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**The forum was presented with a report that would have been taken to the postponed Geographic Forum the previous evening. The report set out how KBC intended to conduct the Budget Consultation Exercise for 2016. The forum noted that they wished to see budgetary details in an easier to understand format at the next meeting in February. It was agreed that the Chair would raise the issue at the next meeting of the Executive Committee on 9th December. | **Chair** |
| **15.RF.47** | **DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING**The next meeting of the Forum would be held on 4th February 2016. An offer was made by Wilbarston Parish Council to host the meeting.  |  |

(The meeting started at 7.00pm and ended at 9:35pm)

Signed ……………………………………………..

Chair

*DJP*