

**NOTES OF THE EASTGATE WARD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION OPEN MEETING, THURSDAY 7TH
NOVEMBER 2013, BAPTIST CHURCH, BURY ST EDMUNDS**

Apologies Received: David Nettleton, Patsy Warby, Susan Carling, Sarah Green, Mark Turner, Trevor Beckwith, Diane Everitt, David Cowley, Rob and Lorraine King, Jenny & Tony Goff

Tim Page (Chairman) opened the meeting he introduced the Committee and PCSO Helen Morgan. Thanks were passed to Keith Fennelow for the production of the Flyers for the meeting.

Speaker – Peter Daniel, Gypsy Roma & Traveller Service Co-ordinator

Peter Daniel advised that Norfolk and Suffolk work as a partnership. Procedures are in place to deal with unauthorised encampments and through presenting the facts it was hoped that residents would have a better understanding of processes. This joined up approach was developed in 2007.

It is usual that the Police are the first point of contact and the Police work closely with the Gypsy Roma & Traveller Service Co-ordinators.

An initial visit is made to the encampment and is an impact assessment. The impact on the settled community, environmental and economic impact and community facts are all taken into consideration alongside issues from the point of view of the travellers. Both points of view are looked at.

The Protocol for Unauthorised Encampments then requires for a Case Conference to be convened led by the County Council inviting Police, Education, Health, councillors. This meeting ensures that the Local Authority fulfil their duty of care. A welfare assessment is undertaken which is robust. The group profile and history is also researched through the database that is held. Waste and sanitation is also investigated. Decisions are made without elected members present so there is no bias towards decisions made so the meetings are held in 2 parts. Sometimes decisions are made to tolerate encampments other times the move is made to evict. There is currently only one authorised site in Suffolk at West Meadows in Ipswich and this site is full. Decisions are made taking into account the Human Rights Act.

There is no short stay provision in Suffolk but there are 3 sites in Norfolk. When encampments turn up they are directed to these sites. The sites have facilities are hard standing and rent is charged. The sites are on the A11, in Fakenham and in Cromers. They are managed by the Local Authority with an onsite warden. They are not allowed to trade from the site. The charge is between £20 and £35.00 ..When vacant the site is locked

Work is being undertaken to identify land within Suffolk, currently to no avail.

Question -What if an encampment is on private land?

Answer: No duty of care, landowner can call in bailiffs and travellers be off sight in 12 hours. **Gypsy Roma & Traveller Service Co-ordinators can assist land owners with a common law notice.**

Question: There is a constant presence in Bury St Edmunds and the same group are moving sites around town. It is understood they are Irish Travellers as opposed to English. Why are they not going to Ipswich?

Answer: There is no room presently. The travellers are looking to settle in Bury St Edmunds, they like the town and want to buy a piece of land.

It was noted that these travellers are not helping themselves. The last encampment at Ram Meadow a party was held which went on until the early hours of the morning (4.00 a.m.), dogs were barking, music was played. Residents were in a position where they had work the next day. Despite calls being made to the Police, the Police were observed to attend but to merely drive by the encampment and then drive off without exiting their vehicle.

Action: The date will be established and information passed to PCSO Helen Morgan who will look into this incident and report back to Tim Page

Also of note, which angers and disgusts residents, is the level of mess that is left behind when the encampment moves on. It was thought that the Council would take action sooner during events taking place in town and residents found this frustrating. Residents also have worries about children needing to go to school, attend health appointments what about their requirements?

Peter Daniel said that he agreed with what had been said but has to act with the remit of the Human Rights Act, he understood that this is sometimes balanced in the wrong way but as Liaison officers they have to undertake their role. Partying until early hours could also be reported as anti social behaviour, particularly if loud music is involved.

Tim Page sought clarity on who residents should contact if an encampment arrives. Peter Daniel confirmed that the Police should be first, they ensure law and order and would need to know if there is criminal activity. A call could also be made to the Lead Agency and the councillor who acts on their behalf so if the encampment was at Ram Meadow this would be Patsy Warby.

It was noted that there was in fact a purpose built site in Bury St Edmunds for the travellers but they smashed it up and set fire to it. This had been council money, the site was derelict for years but the Crime Investigation Centre has now been built on the site.

Peter Daniel advised that sites are currently being sourced with the assistance of the Council, a couple have been identified.

It was reported to the meeting that the gypsies at the Ram Meadow encampment had abandoned puppies and left faeces and rubbish it is stories like this that make people change their views about travellers. It is a small community and stories soon circulate.

Peter Daniel gave some background to the current travellers and was surprised by their behaviour as they were a responsible family and felt that the main hub of the family would not cause trouble but acknowledged that the encampment is joined by other family members so does change size. Residents said that this was not their experience of the family, particularly given the recent party at which a physical punch up was also observed.

It was suggested by one resident that while he had empathy with the travellers he to had a motor home and travelled the country and felt that if they were not responsible and did not comply they get moved on. The Local Authority are regarded as a soft touch and whilst well meaning they appear to be manipulated. If they do not comply with the general Law they do not get to stay and action will have to be taken by the Court of Human Rights in Brussels. It was said that if authorities were as robust in their consideration of the general public as they are the rights of travellers then possibly not have the antipathy that is evidenced, this state has been reached because of a “woolly attitude” of people of responsibility in society.

It was queried about the travellers trading from encampments. Peter Daniel confirmed that they cannot trade from short stay sites but when the encamp in Bury these are not official sites. Vulnerable, gullible members of the town are employing the travellers.

PCSO Helen Morgan advised that as soon as they are advised of an encampment they log the move and an officer is sent to the site to engage with the family and establish how long they plan to stay.

It was noted that local residents have lost faith in the actions of the Police as recent calls to the Police when the alarm at the Bury Town Football club has gone off in the middle of the night, when speaking to the operator if nobody suspicious is seen no action is taken, despite the fact that the club has suffered break ins.

PCSO Helen Morgan advised she was unable to comment but would take the information back to the station. She was aware from personal experience that cursory checks are made to ensure the building is secure when alarms sound but faulty alarms are not supported as the fault is due to poor maintenance.

PCSO Helen Morgan reported that there has been an increase in catalytic converter thefts in town.

Tim Page passed on his condolences following the death of Helen's colleague. Helen Morgan advised that Dawn Rowan would not be joining the Team. The number of PCSO's had increased to 4 and there are also 3 Police Constables within the Town team.

A new Sergeant has also been sanctioned as the area is considered to be too big for one Sergeant to cover.

It was noted from the floor, not from the EWCA Committee that councillors were missing from the Open Meeting.

Tim Page gave thanks to the Committee and to Hazel Jackaman from Hazelwood Dance who had stepped up to assist in delivering the leaflets. Dave Cowley, 103 Northgate Street passed on his thanks via Tim Page for getting Mr Williams to sort out his property, it was a finally sorted and a new tenant in situ.

The yellow line saga in Barwell Road continues. The consultation was held in Spring, residents made suggestions for the position of the lines and details were finalised. The problem now is the council combining jobs across the town. The sticking point is that there is controversy in other part of town where their yellow lines should go. Abdul Karim has been most helpful on this issue.

Beckwith Crossing was unfortunately the victim of a motor accident resulting in the beacon requiring replacing. Unfortunately it would appear beacons are a rare commodity, traffic lights more common. Alternative LED lights were looking into and Trevor Beckwith agreed to fund but this suggestion was turned down by Suffolk County Council so a replacement beacon is awaited. The contract is outsourced so it just a case of waiting. The site should be closed off but due to the width of the pavement tis is not possible on the Abbey Gardens site. The situation is therefore very dangerous, an accident waiting to happen.

Doug Conran gave an update on the Swan Surgery. The pharmacy is now committed to opening 100 hours a week and changes have been made to the car parking areas (which has resulted in more cars being parked in Barwell Road).

Parking in Cotton Lane – Drive Vauxhall

Concern was expressed about the use of parking bays and loading bays in front of Drive Vauxhall and vehicles near the bay by the toilets on the entry to Ram Meadow Car park. This issue has been ongoing for a number of years, the bays were made in consultation with the Police and Drive Vauxhall. It was suggested to the concerned resident that she make contact directly with Drive Vauxhall and the Manager – Sarah Ferrari.

Any Other Business

It was thought that the Police should be invited to speak at the AGM in May

Tim Page confirmed that he will stand down as Chairman, Lynda Seldis will stand down as Vice Chair at the AGM in May so new members need to be sought. It was hoped that Doug Conran will be joining the Committee. Meetings are held 4 times a year and usually last for 1 to 1.5 hours, a leaflet drop is action twice yearly and there is an AGM and an Open Meeting. Any interested parties to contact Tim Page.

A funding bucket was made available and all donations gratefully received.