

Minutes of Romsey Forum

19th September 2007 held at Romsey Town Hall

Present: Frank Akerman, David Barker, Mark Cooper, Felicity Courtenay, Sally Leach, Phoebe Merrick, Brian Palmer, John Parker, Tessa Parker. Sandra Smith, Ian Tripp,

Speakers: Colin Wright, HCC; Graham Smith, TVBC; Peter Shelley, HCC; Gavin Hunter, Wilts & Dorset Bus Company.

In the Chair: Julian Jones. **Minutes:** Carolyn Nixon.

Item 1: Apologies:- Jill Gethin, Steve Lees, Henry Maddick, Helen Murray, John Burgess, Peter Phillips, Sandra Gidley, Roy Perry, Caroline Noakes, Ian Bullivant, Rod Simpson, Cllr Mrs P Mutton (Mayor of Test Valley).

Item 2: Minutes of the Romsey Forum 20th June 2007

These had been circulated electronically and in hard copy at the meeting. It was proposed by J Parker, seconded by D Barker that the minutes be approved. Carried

Item 3: Matters Arising.

Leonard Cheshire: Following his visit to the last meeting, the Regional Director had written to update the Forum on their future plans. The charity had changed its name to 'Leonard Cheshire Disability', in keeping with its aim to broaden its field of activities beyond that of providing care homes, to include campaigning more widely on disability issues. Action: letter to be passed to Disability Forum.

Item 4: Planning Update - Graham Smith, Senior Planning Officer TVBC

The inspector's report on housing need for the next 18 years in urban South Hants had been published in August and was still proposing the building of 3,900 dwellings, of which 3,300 would be on greenfield sites. Once the Secretary of State had considered the report, there would be a period of consultation next spring, with a view to adoption in autumn 2008. Once the proposals were with TVBC, planning officers would ensure that the Forum would be included in the consultation process.

Plans to build 800 (of the 3,900) dwellings on the Abbotswood site were unchanged. An application was expected before the end of the year and the developers would be asked to make a presentation to the Forum

Item 5.1: Local Bus Services - Peter Shelley, Colin Wright, HCC

Peter Shelley explained that HCC, in partnership with the local, district and voluntary sector, was now preparing the tendering process for bus services in Romsey. The county council had a legal responsibility to look at gaps in commercial services, in order to provide for social need. They had a budget of £6m p.a. to support bus services, which currently meant that 1 in 6 journeys was subsidised. HCC also encouraged Quality Bus Partnerships, such as with Blue Star, where county money went to fund the infrastructure, new bus shelters etc. HCC also encouraged other schemes, such as Cango, Dial A Ride and 'Call and Go', and co-ordinated Fare Pass (100,000 now issued). These various initiatives, together with increased promotion, had contributed to a measurable increase in bus patronage.

An Area Review was currently under way, building on what had been learnt from District reviews in 2005 but they had to bear in mind that costs (+8%) were rising faster than income (+2-3%). Where areas of need were identified, various options had to be considered. These might include re-routing existing services or replacing a bus with a taxi service. Options would be discussed with the Test Valley Transport Forum in October and then February 2008, at which time invitations to tender would be published. Four year contracts would be awarded in June 2008.

Colin Wright then spoke in more detail about Romsey's current bus services and how timetables were dependent on cost and the amount of funding available. HCC could only have an influence on those services for which there was most need. He gave the results of the feedback they had received from various consultation exercises and admitted that some of the requests, such as bus routes to main hospitals and to the railway station, were of long standing. He hoped that the area review process would allow the county council to review and perhaps re-order its priorities in the light of its consultation. He promised to keep the Forum updated on any further developments.

Item 5.2: Questions/Comments from the floor

Colin Wright agreed to query with Stagecoach why student passes were not being accepted on the Rail Link bus and why rail tickets were not always accepted on the X66 buses. He thought that the new Three Rivers Rail Partnership could look at the provision of railway halts at Nursling / Halterworth.

The Cango service had failed in Romsey because there were other options available to travellers and the pre-booking system had not been popular. However, it was still successful in the Andover area.

The Farepass scheme had strong Government support and it was therefore assumed that funding would continue.

The county cannot provide buses in competition to existing commercial services but they could better publicise routes, e.g. connecting services to Southampton hospital. They could also explore the proposal that bus drivers give out more information about destinations.

Gavin Hunter (Wilts & Dorset) explained that, where bus fares were higher than rail fares, they compensated by providing more frequent services.

Buses to Romsey station: HCC is in discussion with TVBC about providing a turning circle for a mini bus but this will depend on funding available and could take several years to resolve. The Three Rivers Partnership is pushing for this.

Item 6: Any Other Business

Neighbourhood wardens

David Barker queried a grant given by the Town Council to the warden service. He thought it might be better spent on allotments. Cllr Cooper replied that the money had been given because the Town Council liked the concept of neighbourhood wardens, considering them to be a better investment than community support officers, as they had guaranteed to respond directly to requests of the council.

Crossing point for pedestrians at Southampton Road roundabout.

Cllr Cooper agreed to investigate the safety of this crossing.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm

NEXT MEETING WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2007, 7.30PM, ROMSEY TOWN HALL