

SOHAM AND EAST NEIGHBOURHOOD PANEL

**Wednesday, 9th October 2013, Soham Village College, 7:00pm.
(Performing Arts Centre)**

PRESENT

Cllr Derrick Beckett (Chairman) – East Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Tony Cornell – East Cambridgeshire District Council
Rev. Mike Banyard – Rector of 3 Rivers Parishes
Cllr Malcolm Roper – Fordham Parish Council
Cllr Jeanette Malkin – Isleham Parish Council
Cllr George Ginn – Soham Town Council

OFFICERS

Giles Hughes – Head of Planning & Sustainable Development Services
East Cambridgeshire District Council
Alistair McKie – East Cambridgeshire District Council
Insp. Paul Ormerod – Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Jackie Trower – Sanctuary Housing
Janis Murfet – East Cambridgeshire District Council
Matthew Hall – Cambridgeshire County Council

IN ATTENDANCE

Cllr Pauline Wilkes – Isleham Parish Council
Alan Williams – Ely Foodbank
Howard Laver – Ely Foodbank
6 members of the public

S&ENP 13/12 Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the autumn meeting of the Panel.

S&ENP 13/13 Introductions and Apologies

The Chairman introduced all the officers present from agencies.

It was noted that an apology for absence had been received from Cllr Tony Parramint.

S&ENP 13/14 Chairman's Announcements and Consultation Items

The Chairman asked Members and Officers to sign the attendance sheet, and members of the public to include their email address and postcode. He also asked that everyone complete the questionnaire, as the feedback was very helpful.

After reminding everyone of the fire instructions, the Chairman highlighted the following consultation items:

- Annual Canvas 2013/14
- Cambridgeshire County Council – Future Years Savings
- Consultation on Proposed Major Modifications to the submitted East Cambs Local Plan
- Consultation on draft Supplementary Planning Document on Community-Led Development

S&ENP 13/15 Neighbourhood Update

Giles Hughes, East Cambridgeshire District Council summarised the issues relating to the District Council and made the following comments:

- Incidences of dog fouling on the recreation ground, and complaints about intimidation in Fordham should be reported to ECDC. The Enforcement Officer can monitor areas with multiple complaints.
- With regard to sites for building accommodating more housing than planned in Soham, the Council is preparing a new Local Plan for the District and it identifies a number of major sites in Soham. Each will be judged on a site by site basis to ensure compatibility with the surrounding area.
- The rubbish left on Priory Green was in Isleham, not Soham. This would have been reported to Veolia to be cleared as soon as possible.
- The EMR sound barrier (Snailwell) is currently being erected and it is hoped that it will be completed by the end of October. Complaints are still being received and logged.
- Any reports of flytipping into Soham Lode will be passed onto the Enforcement Officer to investigate for evidence, and then Veolia will be contacted to arrange safe removal.

In the absence of a County Council representative, Mr Hughes presented the section relating to Cambridgeshire County Council and commented on the following issues:

- In connection with the lack of public transport in Chippenham, Isleham and Snailwell, all current contracted services were being reviewed over the next two and a half years. Services in the Chippenham area were programmed to be reviewed for April 2014; consultation would commence towards the end of 2013. The overall funding available was being reduced across the county from £2.7 million to £1.5 million. However, there was some good news. As part of the

Section 106 Agreement being negotiated for the new supermarket in Soham, there would be a bus service on three days a week. The route would run through Fordham, Isleham and Wicken.

- The sign that was down on the A142 had been reported to the Highways department.
- The Traffic Signals Team are investigating the fault with the flashing lights on the Weatheralls crossing in Soham.
- The County Council is urging members of the public and local councils to report potholes in the road using the on-line service rather than by telephone, as it allows County to offer a more efficient service.

With regard to this latter issue, the Chairman requested that a comment be sent to the County Council to the effect that their reporting system is “abysmal”. In his experience it does not work and their officers do not respond when contacted.

It was noted that there was nothing to report in respect of Sanctuary Hereward.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Inspector Paul Ormerod gave an update on the actions taken by the Neighbourhood Policing Team to address the priorities set by the Panel at its last meeting:

Shed/Garage Burglaries across the Panel Area

Targeted patrols had taken place overnight, with a particular focus on Fordham, Isleham and Soham. Overall, Burglary Non Dwelling had decreased in the area by 58.3%, but proactive night-time patrols in the Soham, Fordham and Isleham areas remained an ongoing priority. Regular meetings were taking place with police colleagues in Suffolk and Norfolk to share intelligence in relation to cross-border criminality

Anti-Social Behaviour in Soham

Regular patrols had been taking place, with the focus being on two distinct patterns of anti-social behaviour:

- Youth related (including anti-social use of scooters and rowdy/nuisance – especially in the area of the Recreation Ground, High Street and Brook Dam Lane, and the Kingfisher Estate and nearby streets;
- Alcohol related ASB linked to the night time economy – particularly on Friday and Saturday nights around licensed premises in the town centre.

Although the statistics suggested a big increase, some of the reports were not what would be classed as typical anti-social behaviour. They related to parking,

neighbour disputes, noise complaints, littering and nuisance messages on social media.

Numerous Guardian Awareness Program (GAP) letters had been sent out to parents following incidents in Soham, including 19 after an incident on 23rd August where damage was caused to vehicles and a "For Sale" sign in the Clay Street area.

A number of youth projects, funded by the East Cambs Community Safety Partnership (CSP), had taken place over the summer holidays and initial reports suggested that they were successful in engaging with individuals believed to have been involved in ASB and disorderly behaviour.

It was noted that Soham stood out in the District in terms of problems with young people. ASB would therefore continue to be a priority for the East Cambs Policing Team as well as the East Cambs CSP.

Parking around the school areas

Regular patrols had taken place in the areas around schools, but Officers had reported that they had not come across any offences or had to issue tickets as a result of these.

Statistics

All crime was down, with the figures being at their lowest for almost three years.

Other Issues

There were still sporadic incidences of overnight thefts from sheds and garages, and vehicle crime was also becoming more of an issue. Inspector Ormerod gave an instance of two vehicles having been stolen from Soham and used for various offences within the area. Thanks to the vigilance of a resident who had managed to take a photograph of one of the cars as it was being driven away, the Police were able to link it to a number of activities that had taken place. Inspector Ormerod said he wished serious acquisitive crime to be retained as a priority, as there was a lot of activity going on in the area and he urged everyone to report anything that they thought looked suspicious

Cllr Aitchison asked about the timing of the patrols around the Pavilion on the Recreation Ground in Soham, as there had been some problems with youths causing a disturbance while meetings were going on inside the building; this usually happened at around 7.00pm. Inspector Ormerod said the patrols usually took place on days and lates, and when the fun bus and drop in sessions were happening. However, he would feed this back to the ASB Co-ordinator (who had been trying to argue the case that more ASB patrols were needed in Soham), and have some earlier patrols sent out.

Cllr Ginn enquired how many Neighbourhood Watch schemes there were in Soham; the Inspector said he would check and let him know.

The Chairman concluded by requesting that the PCSO patrols be kept around the schools.

S&ENP 13/16 Shape Your Place – Year One Update

At the invitation of the Chairman, Matthew Hall, Community Engagement & Communications Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council, gave a short presentation to update the Panel on the “Shape Your Place” (SYP) community project.

It was noted that there were 5 sites in East Cambridgeshire (one covering each Neighbourhood Panel area) and a total of 18 sites across the county. In East Cambridgeshire the partners included the County and District Councils, the Fire & Rescue Service, and the Police.

The first 18 months had shown the website to have been a very effective means of community engagement, with in excess of 18,000 visitors and 42,000 visits. Over 100 issues had been raised and more than 1,300 comments posted.

Mr Hall explained that SYP comprised three main parts: issues, comments, and blogposting. All posts were moderated before publication, all sites were mobile responsive, and all the sites operated 365 days of the year. Any issue raised had to have a response within 10 working days, and people could use the website to start campaigns, and lobby groups etc. The website was also used to alert local politicians of matters that might be relevant to them and he gave an example to illustrate the point.

With regard to residents’ thoughts about SYP, Mr Hall informed the Panel that across the whole county, more than 75% of visitors had found the sites easy to use. Over 90% had found the sites helpful, and in excess of 55% felt the sites helped them to influence local decision making.

Looking to the future, Mr Hall said it was hoped that community engagement would be increased. The project had a dedicated Community Engagement Officer, and there would be exploration of links with the new Police Neighbourhood Alert scheme. It was also hoped to have closer integration with other schemes, and to be able to publish even more content to attract more visitors.

Having concluded his presentation, Mr Hall responded to comments and questions from the Panel and members of the public.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Mr Hall explained how the system worked when somebody reported an issue. The details were sent to the relevant partner and they had to reply within 10 working days. Not everything could be

resolved, but an answer would be provided; the system was very transparent. The Chairman said it worried him that SYP was “faceless”; he had been trying to get a response from County Highways for over three months without any success

A member of the public thought the “one stop shop” approach would make things easier, but he wondered whether the scheme would turn out to be just another cost base. Mr Hall replied that SYP was a means of communicating with hard to reach groups, but the scheme would be reviewed. The Chairman interjected, saying that the Neighbourhood Panels had always prided themselves that every issue was taken forward.

Cllr Roper asked if any other areas had a similar sort of scheme. Mr Hall said SYP was fairly unique and groundbreaking, and he thought that Cambridgeshire was setting an example for others. Inspector Ormerod concurred, adding that he had recently attended a national conference to speak on Shape Your Place and the consensus of opinion was that it was a groundbreaking scheme.

Cllr Roper thought it would be useful to promote SYP in the Parish magazines, and Cllr Aitchison suggested that there should be more widespread publicity of the scheme as a “one stop shop”. Mr Hall said he would feed this back to the Community Engagement Officer to be actioned.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hall for an informative presentation.

S&ENP 13/17 Service Review of Neighbourhood Panels

At the invitation of the Chairman, Giles Hughes, Head of Planning & Sustainable Development Services, gave a brief presentation on the findings of the Service Review of the Neighbourhood Panels and made comment under the following headings:

- A Brief History - the scheme started as a pilot in the Soham area in 2006 and was launched across the District in 2008. The Panels were set up when there were very limited alternatives to face-to-face meetings, but times had now moved on.
- Strengths – the Panel meetings gave the opportunity to raise issues with key service providers in the District and provided a “face” for the public services. The partner agencies had a positive attitude towards working together to solve problems. The Panels promoted a greater awareness of the needs and priorities of communities and were a cost effective way for the Constabulary to deliver on the requirement to hold a “beat meeting”.
- Weaknesses – it was noted that attendance was decreasing; the average public attendance was 0.05% of the population of the Soham & East Panel. Of the issues raised in 2012/13, 44 out of 76 were fault reporting, and all issues

could have been dealt with in another way. The Panels were not complying with the Terms of Reference; 5 out of the 6 key tasks were not being met. With regard to consultation with the Town and Parish Councils, it was noted that the Panel meetings were least valued as a method of community engagement but most valued as a forum for sharing information.

- Cost effectiveness – each Panel meeting had Officer representation from Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Cambridgeshire County Council, Sanctuary Housing and East Cambridgeshire District Council. There were 4 ECDC staff involved in every Panel meeting, and the estimated cost of this to ECDC was £13,000 per annum.
- Conclusions of the Service review Group – it was concluded that Neighbourhood Panels were not an effective form of community engagement and also not cost effective. There were more efficient and effective mechanisms now in place for issues to be raised and resolved – for example Shape Your Place.

During the ensuing discussion, the Rev. Banyard asked who had served on the Review Group. Mr Hughes replied that they had tried to achieve a broad representation. The Group comprised Officers and Members from ECDC, and representatives from the County Council, the Constabulary and Sanctuary Housing. There had also been meetings with the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the Panels to gain their feedback. There had not been any public consultation, but letters had been sent out to the parishes to seek their views.

Mr Hughes continued, saying that a number of suggestions had been put forward and one consideration was to replace the Panel meetings with a Parish Conference. This would offer the chance for the parishes to come together and discuss matters face to face. The Chairman asked whether the public would be able to attend, and was told that this would be given thought.

In response to a question from Mr Laver, Mr Hughes explained that the 5 tasks that had not been met were as follows:

- Links with the East Cambridgeshire Strategic Partnership – the Partnership was disbanded in 2012;
- Advising service providers of the views and concerns of the wider public;
- The opportunity to look at how the Sustainable Community Strategy could be delivered;
- How actions were to be dealt with between meetings; and
- How to support the Parish Plans – this had not been a big factor.

A member of the public suggested that the decline in attendance was due to lack of awareness and secondly, because of people being nervous of coming to such meetings. Cllr Roper asked how well the meetings were advertised and was informed that various methods had been tried over the years. This included emails, notices in parish magazines and even putting “A” boards on the side of the road before a meeting.

Inspector Ormerod recalled one meeting in Burwell where the attendance was very poor despite having been given blanket coverage. He did not want to go back to the situation where priorities were being set by Central Government, and he thought that the Parish Conference model could be useful.

Cllr Aitchison said it was all very well talking about communicating with people by Facebook or Twitter, but there were still many who did not have, or did not want to use computers or mobile phones and she wondered how they would be reached. Mr Hughes agreed that the parish councils would have an important role to play, and there would still be a need for face to face contact.

The Chairman drew the discussion to a close by reminding everyone that there was one common factor – people only tended to come to the meetings when there was an issue, and this was a low crime area. He expressed the hope that whatever replaced the Panels, the sense of locality would be retained.

S&ENP 13/18 Foodbank

At the invitation of the Chairman, Alan Williams and Howard Laver gave a presentation about the aims and work of the local foodbanks.

Mr Williams commenced by stating that food poverty was a very real issue in our communities and foodbanks across the nation saw an increase last year to 350,000 people being fed per year. It was a misconception that only benefit claimants used the foodbanks; the common thread that ran right across society was that many people simply did not have the reserves to see them through a crisis.

The Ely Foodbank was set up in 2012 and it was originally the “Churches Together in Ely” initiative, although it had since become a community scheme. In the first nine months 15 tonnes of food was given out to over 1700 people; this represented 18,000 meals and there was no sign of demand decreasing. It was reported that 1:5 of the clients came from Soham and the surrounding area.

The Soham foodbank opened in July 2013 and operated out of the Salvation Army Hall for an hour every Thursday. There had been a variety of clients through the door and it had been noted that while the voucher system seemed to work if there were children in the family, for adults it could be more problematic.

Mr Williams explained that the people who were referred to the foodbanks were given vouchers which would enable them to collect 3 day's worth of food. It was their choice whether they used them in Ely or Soham, and the food was packed into supermarket bags to avoid any stigma. Further foodbanks were due to open in Littleport, Chatteris and March in the coming weeks, (all in association with Ely) and people would be able to redeem their vouchers wherever was most convenient for them.

Mr Laver told the Panel that he was involved in the Soham Foodbank. Logistically, the system was working well and he was lucky to work with such excellent volunteers. The support from the Ely Foodbank was very good, and the help from the Salvation Army had been an absolute godsend. Soham was giving away more food than was being donated and in the first ten weeks of operation, the food bank fed 112 mouths for three days. He reiterated Mr Williams' point about it not just being benefits claimants, some of the people coming through the door were in very sad circumstances.

As far as improving things was concerned, both Mr Williams and Mr Laver agreed that the voucher system could be better and the collection of food locally needed enhancing. There was also much public misunderstanding about foodbanks and this too needed to be addressed.

In response to a question from Cllr Roper, Mr Williams said that the vouchers would cover enough food for three days, but clients could come back, and help provided on an ongoing basis if necessary. It was important to try and ensure that the most vulnerable members of society were looked after.

Mr Hall wished to know if the public could donate money as well as food. The Panel noted that either would be acceptable and monetary donations could be handed in to the shops where the foodbanks had collection points. Having been asked if there would be a Christmas publicity campaign, Mr Williams said it was an all year round thing. Mr Hall said he would contact Mr Williams to discuss how Shape Your Place could help.

Cllr Cornell said that in his capacity as Chairman of ECDC, he had chosen the Foodbank as his charity for the year and an offering would be made after the forthcoming civic service.

The Chairman thanked Messrs Williams and Laver for coming and speaking to the Panel, saying he thought that the need to have such a scheme was a sad reflection on our society.

S&ENP 13/19 Neighbourhood Issues

The following issues were raised by Parish representatives/public:

PARISH	ISSUE	
Chippenham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadside litter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECDC (Waste Services)
Fordham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog fouling • Speeding • Lower Carter Street onto Soham Road, Veolia do not collect the black sacks left outside properties • Address passed to Waste Services of a property who may need additional assistance to bring rubbish from the rear of the property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECDC (Waste Services) • Police • ECDC (Waste Services) • ECDC (Waste Services)
Isleham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish Councils don't know the amount of houses and number of bedrooms per house when a housing application is approved • Areas available for unaffordable housing in expanding areas of villages • Primary school rubbish not collected. No new wheelie bins (recycling) provided to the school • Potholes in the village - East Fen Road and Houghton's Lane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECDC (Planning) • ECDC (Planning) • ECDC (Waste Services) • CCC (Highways)
Kennett	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadside litter and grass needs cutting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECDC (Waste Services)
Snailwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadside litter and grass needs cutting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECDC (Waste Services)
Soham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motorbikes on the High Street and on the Recreation Ground • Adizone damage to the floor – advice needed from the police about preventing damage in future / more patrols • Anti social behaviour on the Recreation Ground • Overgrown hedges on roadsides • Kingfisher Drive lights are out / not working • Light on the High Street is out / flashing near the Chinese restaurant • Speeding check required in Mereside 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Police • Police • CCC (Highways) • CCC (Highways) • CCC (Highways) • Police
Wicken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System for reporting potholes does not work at the County Council. Reports have not been responded to and phone calls not answered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCC (Highways)

S&ENP 13/20**Panel Prioritisation**

The Panel agreed that the policing priorities should be:

- Serious acquisitive crime
- Anti social behaviour in Soham (Halloween)
- Parking around schools

S&ENP 13/21**Forward Agenda**

The Chairman reminded everyone that the final meeting of the Soham & East Panel would take place in January 2014.

The meeting closed at 9:06pm.