

ACRA Informal Meeting with CBC Directorate 30th May 2012

CBC were represented by David McIntosh, David Barnes and Neil Farmer

ACRA were represented by John Pendrill (ACRA Chairman) and Jim Biggin (ACRA Secretary)

Autumn 2012 CBC Road Show

CBC currently has no firm plans to undertake any Road Shows this year. A number of possible topics were discussed: the progress of Localism; the management of trees on CBC land and those that are covered by a TPO; the on-going financial situation; Christchurch Hospital. Each of these topics is considered in more detail later in this note.

John Pendrill and Jim Biggin affirmed that West Christchurch is interested in a CBC presentation, provided a suitable topic can be agreed, and they undertook to ask other ACRA members for their level of interest

Localism

The process of expanding upon the 2011 legislation continues with a number of consequential enabling Orders due to be issued at the end of June 2012. Until these Orders have been read and understood it is difficult to comment further. In reality little concrete has happened since CBC gave ACRA their useful presentation in April.

One area that will be subject to change is the enforcement of planning decisions. It was generally agreed that CBC should not put "conditions" into planning approvals that it could not subsequently enforce. There is also a current shortfall of resources in Enforcement and this is causing some day-to-day problems.

We need to jointly review this situation in September and include it in a Road Show only if there is something new to say.

Local Trees

ACRA outlined the problems that residents perceive in the management of local trees (both those on CBC land and those on private land that are covered by TPO). In particular first, the problems associated with determining that a tree is dangerous and second, the interpretation of "*amenity value*". The recent case before an Inspector concerning a tree at 27 Durlston Crescent was cited but it was stressed that similar trees can be found in many areas of Christchurch.

CBC undertook to look into its Tree Management Policy following which a meeting between appropriate delegates would be useful to reach a common understanding. This needs to happen reasonably quickly.

CBC does not believe that The Localism Act 2011 gives residents the right to ask for a referendum on the removal of a blanket TPO. However, residents could use the "*Community Right to Challenge*" provisions to seek to run the Tree Management Services themselves. To succeed in such a venture they would have to demonstrate "*adequate capacity*" to manage – a very tall order in such a technically complex area of activity and not one to be recommended.

This whole topic would be a useful one for a Road Show provided full agreement and understanding has been reached between CBC and ACRA both on interpretation and methods of working to be adopted when dealing with individual cases.

The On-going Financial Situation

The situation in 2012-13 remains comparatively healthy thanks to real savings made by the streamlining of services, a course of action that continues to work well. The new Dorset Waste Partnership is also on track both in terms of savings and functionality.

However, CBC stressed that we were only part way through what could be a ten year process of rationalisation of Local Government financing. Cost savings from efficiency improvements would not on their own be sufficient to see us through these difficult times and many Council services would have to be reviewed and modified. To make matters worse, Central Government has reduced the local retention percentage of business rates from new enterprises leaving CBC with less income than expected.

There is probably a level of weariness with this topic in the local population and it might better be considered in autumn 2013 when the budget for 2014-15 is under review.

Christchurch Hospital

CBC is as involved in the proposed changes as it can be given limited power to act and is doing all it can to ensure it can influence positive change to the delivery of health services in Christchurch. The best way they feel to do this in this instance is to adopt a collective pan-Dorset approach because this is where the most power and influence is to be found - a strategy that is supported by the hospital. They have therefore referred the matter to the Joint Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee.

This may well be a good topic for an autumn Road Show but it is by no means clear that CBC would be the right principal people to address it.

Navitus Bay Wind Farm

The CBC tactic of refraining from detailed comment at this potentially premature stage was briefly discussed and supported by ACRA. We anticipate more discussion of this topic in months to come following the Eneco presentation in June.

Jim Biggin

June 2012