

HAREWOOD AND WETHERBY TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL FORUM
10th December 2007

Agenda Items:

- Rory Barke - Quality Parish Status and Devolved Services
- Cllr Shelbrooke - Establishment of Flood Working Groups

Quality Parish Status and Devolved Services

Rory Barke attended the meeting and explained why Leeds City Council supports Quality Parish Status (QPS). He stated that QPS acts as a kyte mark of quality and provides both the public and the Leeds City Council with assurances on the ability of the council.

Currently four parish councils in the North East Area have gained QPS. Forum members agreed that it provided the public with assurance and improves the way they work. But they contended that there were currently no financial benefits of gaining QPS, while achieving it does not lead to a difference in the way Leeds City Council views or works with the Parish Councils.

With regard to devolved services they felt that certain previously agreed actions had not been upheld. Grass cutting was an example and many have been unable to gain access to the cutting schedules. Some forum members expressed a desire to deliver this service themselves, while others would just like to provide assistance with monitoring to improve the service. Members of the forum feel that they are not included enough in decision making.

Members of the Forum provided the following comments:

- Establishment of Parish Council Charters with individual Departments setting out how they should work with Parish Councils.
- Use Parish Councils to monitor contracts such as grass cutting.
- Send all planning applications to Parish Councils for comment in the first instance.
- Make all officers aware of the Town and Parish Charter and provide training on Parish Councils and how to communicate/work with them.
- Stop charging Parish Councils for holding contested elections.
- Allow the clerk of the Parish Council to speak directly with the planning officer and not get stopped at reception.
- Use the local knowledge of parish councils to monitor grass cutting and litter picking to improve service delivery.
- Increase and improve communication between Leeds City Council and the Parish Councils.

Establishment of Flood Working Groups

As a result of flooding in the Outer North East Area Cllr. Shelbrooke attended the forum to suggest a localised plan of action to try and reduce the risk of flooding in the future.

He suggested that each Parish Council that was affected by the floods should set up a working group to help monitor becks and tributaries to ensure water continues to flow freely. He stated that this was really the only course of action Parish Councils could take to reduce the level of risk because; the area is not a priority for the Environment Agency to install flood defence systems and it is often unclear which agency or landowner is responsible for maintaining individual waterways. He also stated that climate change, reliance on a Victorian drainage system and flood plain construction had exacerbated the problem.

The Environment Agency will be clearing becks and tributaries this Autumn and Winter and the working groups should begin work once this has been done to ensure the

waterways remain clear. Each working group would only need a small number of people who to inspect about twice a year.

Cllr. Shelbrooke stated that Leeds City Council are currently carrying out a mapping exercise on the drainage systems in Leeds. Members were told to contact Cllr. Shelbrooke if they knew of any unidentified drainage systems in their area. He would then be able to help compile this information and send it to the correct department. Forum members were critical of the current system for unblocking gullies and drains and that an improved regime needs to be implemented to reduce the risk of flooding. Gullies need to be routinely checked and cleared, not just when they are reported as being blocked. Forum members also stated that if Leeds City Council informed them of when they were unblocking gullies in their areas they could help ensure roads were clear of parked cars to enable vehicle access.

Next Meeting

- 24th January 2008.