

MIDDLETON TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE FORUM

Wednesday 20 March 2019
Middleton Library, Long Street, Middleton M24 1AF

MINUTES

Present

Councillor Donna Williams	Middleton Township Chair (Chair of meeting)
Councillor Patricia Dale	Rochdale Borough Council
Councillor June West	Rochdale Borough Council
Councillor Malcolm Boriss	Rochdale Borough Council
Councillor Donna Martin	Rochdale Borough Council
Councillor Phil Burke	Rochdale Borough Council

Officers

Lauren Mason	Township Officer, Rochdale Borough Council and minutes
Andrew Entwistle	Link4Life
Victoria Davies	Middleton Town Centre Management Company
Diane Lodwig	Environmental Enforcement Officer, Rochdale Borough Council
Nick Roberts	TfGM
Stey Shaw	First Bus – Staff Manager (Bolton)
John Roxburgh	First Bus - Operations Manager (Queens Road)

Also in Attendance

14 members of the public and 'Friends of Groups'

Apologies

Councillor Sue Smith	Rochdale Borough Council
Councillor Kallum Nolan	Rochdale Borough Council
Councillor Carol Wardle	Rochdale Borough Council
Councillor Linda Robinson	Rochdale Borough Council

3 members of the public

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

All were welcomed to the meeting by the Chair of the meeting, Councillor Donna Williams, and introductions took place. It was requested that mobile phones were switched off and put on to silent. Lauren gave a reminded for everyone to ensure they had signed in.

Councillor Donna Williams also advised that the agenda would change, with Transport being moved to agenda item 4.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were noted as above.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

All items to be covered under the agenda.

4. TRANSPORT ISSUES

Nick Roberts introduced himself and explained that TfGM is responsible for operational planning of transport, with accountability for school services, Ring & Ride and non-commercial services. Nick explained that TfGM hold a £15 million budget, but advised that although this may sound a lot the service has received a 20% reduction in funding and find themselves facing many budget pressures.

Nick explained that the majority of bus services in Greater Manchester (GM) is operated commercially, so providers are themselves responsible for fares, routes and timetables. Nick advised that there is a regular meeting of the bus network committee, which Councillor Burke attends in his role as Transport Representative for Rochdale Borough Council. This committee considers changes and reductions in services and the views of the public are represented at this meeting.

Nick advised under the GM Mayor there are other options being looked at for the 'buses bill', which in London is a de-commercialised bus network. Nick stated that there is also a decline in public transport use, and this situation is having an impact on bus services.

Stey and John from First Bus introduced themselves, and they advised that the financial strain is also being felt by operators, with the current climate challenging and difficult. Also there are lots of changes coming including the sale of the Queens Road depot to a new operator. Over the last few years, First Bus have improved punctuality and safety of their bus services with lots of new technology being introduced, which is in part about speeding up the journey for customers resulting in less 'loss' journeys.

John and Stey advised that some of the issues they face relate to buses becoming clogged up in city centre traffic. This situation then creates a bottle-neck of buses which eventually are all 'freed' up at the same time, and causes issues for passengers.

Stey advised that in this area there has been problems with vandalism, which then causes issues throughout the whole network. Vandalism can result in a bus being withdrawn from the network, repair issues, loss of time whilst awaiting GMP, and dependant on the level of vandalism, can remove the bus from the network for around 24 hours. Both officers advised that there are not a huge amount of problems, but when these do arise they can affect the whole system, and can be very time-consuming.

Stey advised that if, for example, there is a problem in the city centre, which is going to cause a number of buses to be late, they have no way of relaying this information to customers on the ground quickly. A question was raised regarding the use of digitalised bus stops as Members knew there was a pilot some years ago. John and Stey advised that this never continued and any improvements to bus stops would come under the remit of TfGM.

Councillor Burke advised that current cuts such as the 415 will leave whole communities cut off from the transport network, and it was felt that issues such as road works are a poor excuse. Concerns were that when original discussions took place regarding the commercialisation of services, there were guarantees made that services would be safe, and this hasn't been the case unfortunately.

John advised that for operators, services have to be commercially viable. Concerns were raised about the number of journeys recorded by drivers, and some drivers wave people on, to enable them to move off quickly. John and Stey advised that there is no incentive for drivers to not make passengers 'tap' on as this situation then allows TfGM to fund any subsidised passengers through the payment of lost revenue. There has been improvement in this situation through the installation of new machines and drivers are enthused to get passengers to tap on, and by using new technology there is an improvement in journey speed, which in line frees up buses to enable other journeys to be undertaken by operators.

Councillor Boriss presented a petition regarding the removal of the 415 and 58 bus service. Residents had concerns about the punctuality of the bus service, and felt that this situation could impact on the usage figures for services.

All felt that Nick should look into the service again, and it was agreed that he would investigate this matter further following the comments received this evening. He also agreed to look at whether the bus service could be retendered to see if there are any bus service providers willing to take the route.

A resident advised that he has had issues with travelling to hospitals, and this situation was echoed by others in the room. Examples were given of where people have missed appointments or they have had to pay for taxis to enable them to attend hospital appointments, which can be out of the area due to the structure of Pennines Trust.

A discussion took place about a resident who has complained to TfGM regarding the 415 and 163 service and bus shelters. A written complaint was made on 16 November 2018, and the resident advised that despite regular calls and visits he has made to TfGM Offices he hasn't yet received a response. Nick apologised to the resident and it was agreed that this matter would be looked into by Nick to see why the resident hasn't received a response.

A resident advised that Bowlee and Heywood Old Road have no effective bus service at all between 9.30am – 4pm, as the 167 only runs during rush hour, meaning residents living in this area have no other option than to drive.

A resident raised concerns regarding the 'bottleneck' at the motorway bridge on Manchester New Road and there can often be 3 or 4 of the same bus service clogged up in this area. Residents also advised that between 3pm – 4.30pm buses often don't stop, as they can be full with school children.

5. STREET CLEANING, CLEAN & GREEN

No officer present and no items raised.

6. LINK4LIFE UPDATE

A discussion took place about the Box Office at Middleton Arena. Andrew advised that whilst this matter is still at trial phase, the majority of people are still booking tickets online. As it is under review, it was agreed that Andrew would update further at the next meeting.

7. PUBLIC REALM OFFICERS

Diane Lodwig introduced herself and she advised that the Public Realm Inspector role no longer existed; the team have been split into Enforcement Officers working for Environmental Management and Crime & ASB Officers in the Community Safety Team. The Crime & ASB Officer covering Middleton is Glyn Broady and he can be contacted via the Township Office.

Councillor West raised concerns with Diane regarding fly tipping at All Saints and Martyrs Church on Wood Street. Diane advised that unfortunately as this location is private land, Rochdale Council cannot remove the fly tipping as it is the responsibility of the landowner. (After note: The fly tipping was removed the following day by Rochdale Council following a discussion with senior management).

A discussion took place regarding concerns raised by Councillor Martin about ongoing fly tipping issues. Diane advised that wherever possible Environmental Management will look to identify the offender who has dumped the rubbish. All fly tipping incidents attended are checked for evidence of who has dumped the waste, and where evidence is available a prosecution will be investigated and where possible pursued. If a prosecution is successful then wherever possible the team will arrange a press release as this serves as a reminder to people that fly tipping can carry a hefty consequence.

The large amount of fly tipping which recently took place at Warwick Mill was discussed. Diane stated that this issue was investigated by Stephen Pyke and she isn't able to provide an update. It was agreed that Diane would ask Stephen for an update.

Concerns were raised about ongoing issues in the Town Centre, particularly in relation to people feeding pigeons. It was agreed that Diane would meet with Victoria Davies from Town Centre Management to look at the various ongoing issues in the Town Centre.

Councillor Martin advised that she had a great deal of praise for officers from Environmental Management and it was agreed that her comments would be fed back to the team via Diane. Diane was thanked for attending the meeting.

8. UPDATES

Middleton Town Centre Management Company

Victoria advised that she has developed a great working relationship with Diane Lodwig and visits will be arranged on a regular basis to deal with any issues in relation to the Town Centre.

Councillor Martin queried how Middleton Market is performing and she was advised by Victoria that December and January are always difficult months for markets, but it is continuing to grow.

Victoria stated new backing sheets for the market have been ordered and these will update the markets and also serve to protect the traders from poor weather conditions.

Friends of Middleton View

The Friends of Middleton View advised that their application to Township for funding to repair the knee rail fence was successful, and the grant should be paid within the next few days. Works will be undertaken by the Green Volunteers.

The Friends of group stated that there are ongoing issues at Tonge Fields regarding fly-grazing, which they have previously discussed with Lauren. Unfortunately, without knowing who the owner is/having an address for the owners there is very little that Rochdale Council can do. The Estates Team have written to the last known tenant's address with no success. The group have been advised that they should contact the RSPCA if the horses are in danger. It was agreed that if anyone is able to provide information regarding the horses' owner and their address, this information can be passed to Lauren confidently to be shared with the Estates Team.

Friends of Jubilee Park

All works to the Exedra are now complete and look fantastic. The group were thanked for their ongoing work in keeping the park looking as good as it does.

Friends of Wince Brook

The Friends of Wince Brook advised that during the very heavy rains on Saturday 16 March 2019, Wince Brook did flood and all four bridges within the brook were submerged in water.

A grant application to Township was successful and £7,100 was approved to create new pathways. These paths won't be situated near to the river as Wince Brook is a flood plain.

The group have also applied to Tesco Bags of Help, and they will be in stores in March and April. Everyone was asked to use their tokens to help the group receive funding as these funds will be used with the Township grant towards the pathways.

A discussion took place regarding what will be used to create the pathways, as the recent heavy rain washed away some of the cinder pathways. The group advised that some of the boardwalks will be removed and replaced.

Green Volunteers

The Green Volunteers usually meet on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday, and this morning was spent repairing pathways in Alkrington Woods.

Friends of Alkrington Woods

Since re-launching the group, the Friends of Alkrington Woods have now got a bank account and constitution in place.

One of the first schemes the group are looking to develop is a scheme around the McBride's Wood area, which is the nearest gateway into the Woods from the Town Centre.

A litter pick was scheduled for Saturday 16 March 2019 but it was called off due to the flooding. The group advised that the floods were the worst since December 2015, and when the flooding started it brought sewerage. It was agreed that Lauren would ask Sarah Pilkington from the Environment Agency to make contact with the group regarding this matter.

The pathways installed by the Mersey Trust have been, in parts, washed away, and queried if they could be moved further up to stop this happening in the future. It was agreed that Lauren will ask Mike Cummings to put the group in contact with Officers from the Mersey Trust.

The group's Chairman advised that there are a number of ongoing ASB issues in the Woods at the moment, and in recent weeks there have been four muggings and knives found. Also there are still issues with ASB around Rhodes Lodges. The group queried if the old toilet block and layby could be removed? Concerns were expressed that if the block was demolished it could open up an opportunity for building on the site. All agreed that it will need a multi-agency approach to try and resolve the ongoing issues.

Councillor Martin advised that a clean-up/litter pick has been arranged with pupils at Alkrington Primary supported by Mike Cummings.

Friends of Boarshaw Cemetery

Lauren had been advised via email that the next group meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 9 April 2019 from 2.00pm at the Old Boars Head.

A member of the group asked that thanks to the group Chairman be noted, especially as the group is quite small but continues to work hard to ensure that the cemetery is an attractive and nice place for families to visit.

Friends of Hopwood Woods Nature Reserve

The group again raised concerns about the gullies on the cycle path that have still not been cleared. It was agreed that Lauren will again raise this issue with colleagues in Highways.

Absolute Angling

No representative present to provide an update.

Friends of Bowlee Community Park

The majority of the fencing is now completed, although there may be a small shortfall in funding and it could necessitate a grant application to Township.

A litter pick has been arranged for Saturday 30 March 2019 at 10am.

The Chairman advised that in relation to a school, he has been checking the DfE website for updates and there are now three bidders on the site.

There are a number of markers within the park with poppies on and they may apply to Township for a grant to renovate them.

The next group meeting will take place on 25 April 2019 at 7pm in Bowlee Pavilion.

Friends of Mellalieu Street

The group advised that they have been having some ongoing issues with surface water and suspect that this situation is being caused by blocked drains. It was agreed that this issue would be passed on to Highways by Lauren.

Status4All

No representative present to provide an update.

Middleton Cricket Club

No representative present to provide an update.

Limefields

Councillor Martin advised that she has concerns that some parks are given a lot of support, but others such as Limefields and Penrhyn Park don't receive the same level of support.

Councillor Martin stated that following the last meeting, she met with Environmental Management Officers about the bushes that were encroaching on the fields and football pitches and this resulted in them being cut back.

Councillor Martin asked that it be noted what a great job the gardeners, Steve and Duncan, do in the fields. They attend most morning and clear up and maintain the area.

Middleton Civic Association

A representative asked if there is a Council contingency regarding Warwick Mill, as the owners haven't completed what they originally planned to. Councillors advised that Rochdale Council do attend when they are made aware of issues at the site, and will undertake urgent works as needed, and then bill the owners. The Council also continues to put pressure on the owners.

Middleton in Bloom

A representative from the group advised that the Great British Spring Clean takes place on Sunday 14 April 2019, but as this falls within purdah no Members will be present.

The group advised that they have been at a meeting today about 'social prescribing', which will allow doctors to suggest involvement in groups such as In Bloom to improve patients' health.

Measurements have been sent to Highways regarding the installation they are planning at Springvale. This installation will be a steam train planter, in addition to other ideas throughout Middleton. Once Highways and Environmental Management have given their agreement, the proposals will be sent to Middleton Township Councillors for comments.

Middleton Brass Band

No representative present to provide an update.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS (NOT ALREADY DISCUSSED ON THE AGENDA)

Some of the groups asked if they could share email addresses with each other, and they were advised that at the next meeting a sheet will be provided on the table which groups can complete if they wish to share their contact details with other groups.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS TO BE CONFIRMED VIA EMAIL

Future meeting dates to be advised.