

Ringwood Town Council Meeting 19th December 2007
– a Report from District Councillor Chris Treleven

1) District Council Budget 2008/9

The customary annual budget setting is proving particularly difficult at present. In order that the District portion of the 2008/9 Council Tax increases by no more than 3%, savings of over £500,000 have to be found.

The reasons for this difficulty lie in the decrease in Government funding for the services the Council undertakes. Most of the shortfall arises in my own Portfolio of Planning and Transportation. The new Concessionary Bus Travel scheme currently looks underfunded by at least £300,000, the Planning Delivery Grant is being abolished and replaced by a different Housing/Planning Grant at least £100,000 lower, and income from Land Charges and Searches is likely to be £200,000 lower as Government now insists this service has to compete with the private sector. Work continues.

2) Furlong Car Park Development Options

Cabinet will consider the Steering Group Recommendations on 2nd January. It would not be surprising if my Cabinet colleagues have to take into account the above-mentioned budget difficulties when reaching a decision, together with the increasing uncertainties in the current economic climate of finding a retail development partner.

3) Cooperation with the New Forest National Park relating to future Planning Policies

I have been trying to keep the Joint Members Working Group on the road and overcome the difficulties caused by the National Park withdrawing from the original agreement to produce joint Core Strategies. District Officers and I are particularly keen to ensure that the submitted Policies and Plans of both the District and Park are complementary and compatible. The all-important strategic areas of Housing and employment land provision require joined-up working between our two Authorities. New Forest residents will expect nothing less.

4) Skills Centre – Ringwood School/Brockenhurst College

Following the successful bid to obtain funding from the Learning and Skills Council, there is now an active search by the School and College to find a suitable site in Ringwood for a Skills Centre. Although NFDC does not itself have any appropriate land in ownership (don't mention the Car Park!), both the Head of Planning and the Portfolio Holder for Planning are willing to see how the planning system might bring favoured sites forward.

5) Civic Carol Service, Ringwood Church, December 16th

At the celebratory Service for Christmas, it was good to see so many of our thriving community groups participating together in such an important event. For those of us in public service – both Officers and elected Members - it was comforting to hear the words of Canon John Turpin, giving thanks for such service, and asking us to be mindful that even when there is public controversy (part of the job, as he put it) the over-riding message for us all is to seek the best outcomes for the whole of our community.

PS. Apologies for not attending tonight's Council Meeting, but one of the few perks of the job is to be invited to Ringwood School Christmas Celebration concert. Not to be missed!