

Ringwood Town Council Meeting 28th November 2007
– a Report from District Councillor Chris Treleaven

It has been a busy month since my last report in October. Here are some of the things I've been enjoying:-

1) Possible Development on the Furlong Car Park

The replies to the public consultation document showed only 588 out of 1420 (i.e. 41%) favoured no new development at all on the site. However, the attendance by the public at the NFDC Steering Committee on Nov. 15th indicated that this minority can be vociferous. The Committee concluded that the varied responses to the publicised Options, together with the consideration of Officers and the professional consultants, justified recommending budget-limited steps to investigate further the viability of the 'mixed-use' option. In particular, professional assessment is needed as to whether a necessary commercial partner might be found. Without such a partner, the mixed use Option cannot progress.

2) Core Strategy for the New Forest District to 2026 .

The Preferred Option and the alternatives are now in the public domain for consultation. I am pursuing – with some success – a constructive dialogue with the National Park Authority to work together to achieve compatible strategies for our shared future.

3) On-street parking charges

The Cabinet decided to pursue consultation for a trial scheme in Lymington, which if successful, would be followed for certain parts of the shopping areas of New Milton and Ringwood. So far, the traffic management improvements and the costs of installing meters look evenly balanced compared with doing nothing.

4) The Mineral Extraction Strategy.

The District – as for Towns and Parishes – is a consultee to the Preferred Options Strategy proposed by the County, Unitary and National Park Authorities. NFDC is proposing concentrating on the Ringwood Forest/Somerley existing and extended sites, although there are traffic concerns regarding Harbridge Drove and the impact on the A31 Ashley Heath junction. Roeshott Hill (Christchurch, NE of Stewarts' Nurseries) is considered a satisfactory site, but there could be HGV implications for the B3347 road to Ringwood.

5) Council Tax 2008/9

Your Council will know that the NFDC portion of residents' Council Tax is about 11% of their total. To achieve no more than a 3% rise, savings of 3% are being asked for by an increasingly cash-strapped central Government. Current calculations show difficulties in achieving this, particularly with the Portfolio I carry. We have no idea how central Government will fund the imposed over-60 universally available free bus pass, the amount we can levy on property sale related Land Charges to compete with the private sector (think HIPS) and the cessation of the Planning Delivery grant. These three cost centres can themselves add uncertainty to the tune of nearly £1 million (out of a total net budget of £20+ million.) We are working hard to achieve an acceptable 3% rise overall.

6) Country Town Initiative – Accessibility project bid

It is good to report that your Town Council, NFDC and the County are working together to obtain resources to improve accessibility and street improvements to our Town Centre (end)