

Ringwood Town Council - Annual Meeting - 6th May 2009
- a Report from District Councillor Chris Treleven

During the last year, your District Council has enacted the following new policies of particular relevance to Ringwood residents:-

- 1) Fitness Gym for 8-16 year olds at Ringwood Health and Leisure
Following a successful trial at Applemore Health & Leisure, this new facility for young people has now been introduced at Ringwood. The enthusiastic take-up so far indicates how our young people appreciate these new opportunities for fun and fitness.
- 2) Free Swimming for over-60 and under 17 year olds
NFDC has chosen to implement the Government scheme to offer free swimming at the Leisure Centre for both under 17s and over 60s, even though (as often happens) extra funding from Council resources has been needed. The scheme will operate initially for 2 years.
- 3) Extended Concessionary fares – bus passes
In addition to the statutory off-peak concessionary bus passes, your District Council has used extra resources for New Forest residents who are disabled or over-60 to travel free all day for journeys commencing in the District.
- 4) Improvements to Southampton Road
The County, District and Town Councils are working together to develop and implement proposals to improve the attractiveness for residents, visitors and retailers of the Town Centre area of Southampton Road. Initial funding from (mainly) the County and from Developers' Contributions held by the District Council should allow a start to be made to upgrade this rather forgotten area within the coming year.
- 5) Town Access Plan
Because of the excellent work put in by local people to produce both the Walking and Cycling Strategy and the Signage Strategy, Ringwood has become an early candidate for which the County – with local consultation and Town and District Council partnership - will develop a Town Access Plan. This Plan will define traffic management improvements such that residents and visitors are able to access local facilities such as shops, schools, surgeries etc. safely and within a welcoming and attractive environment. Emphasis will be placed on better walking and cycling routes, pedestrian crossings, measures to reduce congestion, more invitational routes to the within and to the Town Centre, improved designs for car parking and waiting area layouts, and particularly on the aspirations in the published Town Plan.
- 6) Management of Public Finances in current recession
This year, Council finances are showing a shortfall of over £2million, as a result of fewer planning applications and land registry searches, less need for building control inspections, lower interest income on bank deposits and reduced use of leisure centres and amenity car parks.
Considerable effort has been put in to save tax-payers money by redeployment of existing staff, non-replacement of those Officers leaving service and other administrative economies. These efficiency savings, plus a once-off use of reserves, has meant that front-line services are being maintained, although some capital expenditure items are being delayed..
- 7) Core Strategy – basis for development in the next 20 years.
The new version of what used to be called the Local Plan has now been submitted for Public Examination, having been through several local consultations. Emphasis has

been placed on balancing the need to protect the New Forest environment with the need to provide affordable housing and employment opportunities for local people. In the coming months, work will continue to define objectively what is meant by “appropriate development” in our towns and villages, in ways that respect the widely supported views regarding our local distinctiveness without stifling innovation. Maintaining and enhancing the economic viability of our Town Centres is a declared planning policy of our Council, although this remit does not constitute omnipotence! (We have no power to solve everything..... if only!)

8) A31 Traffic Management

The inherent contradiction between having a trunk road serving the growth areas around Southampton in the east and SE Dorset in the west, whilst acting as an access route for our local Ringwood traffic, continues to raise problems. Following locally expressed opinion regarding a 50mph speed limit on the A31, the managers of this route (the Highways Agency) have agreed to address safety and congestion problems in consultation with all three Councils (County, District and Town).

9) Public Facilities – SW Corner of Furlong Car Park

The renewal of the public conveniences and the tourist information centre – possibly as part of a “one-stop” facility for all Council and associated public agencies – is still under study. The delay in assessing the best value facility for meeting the many demands is regrettably related to the current recession, particularly in the commercial property and building sectors. Options should be forthcoming in the near future..

10) Planning Issues

NFDC is the Local Planning Authority for the area outside the National Park (which is its own Planning Authority). As such, planning applications for which Planning Officers have a different recommendation from that of your Town Council are determined by the (elected Member) Planning Development Control Committee. In general, this Member Committee has resisted inappropriate development in Ringwood when faced with over-intensive “garden-grabbing” development, or where our much valued local character and distinctiveness would be compromised. Few Appeals against these refusals have been upheld. On the other hand, new and well-designed proposals which enhance our built environment and at the same time meet local needs are encouraged.

It is worth noting - for the record – that NFDC does not have any powers to influence when existing, approved planning applications will be progressed, or even that an application should be put in. This particularly applies to privately owned sites where publicly expressed frustrations are often voiced. For example:-

- 1) Old Town Hall/Regal Cinema – planning application approved but NFDC cannot influence when this will progress.
- 2) Wellworthy site – has had employment use designation for 20 years, but owners have resisted using this – preferring ‘residential’ use ‘hope value’ enhancement.
- 3) Bus Station in West Street – has residential use designation, but no application has been received from the owners.

(crt4thMay09)