

## Ringwood Town Council Meeting 28<sup>th</sup> July 2010

### – a Report from District Councillor Chris Treleaven

#### 1) New Government Policy announcements – 1) budget cuts

Your Members will have read that all Local Authorities must plan for their Central Government rate support grant being reduced by 25-40% over the next 4 years. For NFDC, this amounts very approximately to a cumulative reduction of £1million each year i.e. £4million reduction per annum by the 4<sup>th</sup> year. Whilst NFDC has been particularly good at making savings over the years without reducing front line services, this new shortfall means we are having to evaluate carefully priorities for continuing service provision. The obvious starting point is “what difference would the public actually notice if we didn’t do something we’ve always done?” Suggestions always welcome!

In this current year, NFDC has already had £650,000 of various grants cancelled plus of course the loss of the over60/under 16 free swimming Government grant.

#### 2) New Government Policy announcements– 2) localism

In November, the Government intends to publish a draft “Localism Bill”, where it is anticipated that many policies and their implementation will be determined at a local level rather than centrally, mirroring no doubt the already announced changes to “free” academy schools outside LEA control, and GP commissioning outside PCT control. It will be interesting to see if this Bill will expand the remit of Parish and Town Councils, and our relationships with community and neighbourhood groups who may be newly empowered with a provision for call-in of Council decisions via petitions etc.

#### 3) New Government Policy announcements– 3) planning

The announced abandonment of Regional Spatial Strategies and their housing targets and of the Planning Inspector- dictated “garden grabbing” permissions will not greatly alter the NFDC position, as these changes are already in place via the adopted Core Strategy and the current work on Development Sites and Local Distinctiveness.

Nevertheless, the new Localism Bill may well include further provision for more local planning powers including majority neighbourhood voting on applications.

Incidentally, the claim by the Minister this week that the planning system has prevented rural affordable (not market) housing schemes coming forward is not true, at least as far as New Forest villages are concerned. It is the resistance of local people to suitable sites being made available that has led in the main to the shortage. If the Minister’s plans are accepted to allow small affordable housing schemes via Community Land Trusts to be built without planning permission, it will be interesting to see how many more sites actually become available for local people as a result. (Even more interesting if this is applied to Towns as well!).

#### 4) Developers’ Contributions

Whist it is perhaps understandable that your Council (P & F Committee) doesn’t like Developers Contributions being levied on small sites – even single sites such as Greenways – two points might be borne in mind –

- If the value of a piece of land is enhanced by a community-based decision to permit a higher market value use, should the community have a small proportion of that realisable benefit in return?
- Town and Parish Councils are always in vociferously claimed need of Developers Contributions for a myriad of locally deserving projects.

#### 5) Ringwood Town Access Plan

The final draft of this Plan is being agreed between County, District and Town Councillors and Officers before publication as a consultation document for public comment. It is intended to sign this off eventually as a Supplementary Planning Document (by the appropriate two County and District Cabinet Members) with the intention of giving robust support for collecting Developers Contributions for specific access improvements for Ringwood. (Even small development sites can contribute a few £ to these!!)

#### 6) Furlong Car Park – new shopping trolley bays

Members will recall that NFDC accepted the need to create several more shopping trolley bays in the Furlong Car Park at strategic points, to discourage shoppers taking their trolleys elsewhere in the Town to unload and then abandoning them there. The budget for this is still currently in place, but because of the possible re-design of the car park layout for the Gateway Project, we are delaying installing these until the design is settled – probably by a few months.

(crt 26.07.10).