

Parish Walk Meeting with StreetScene Managers and Huntington Parish Council. Meeting held on Wednesday 20th September 2017

UPDATE ON 27TH November 2017 – Parish Walk with Mr. Mark Brazil (Streetscene Manager)

Present

Cllr Nick Dodd and Cllr Jacky Creswick – Huntington Parish Council

Mr. Graham Jones – Senior Manager of Streetscene

Ms. Kerrie Brice – Streetscene Service Manager

Louise Gibson – Clerk of Huntington Parish Council

Purpose of the Meeting

Following numerous complaints from residents and Councillors regarding the state of grass verges, hedges and shrubs/trees with no response from CWaC, Councillors Jacky Creswick and Nick Dodd attended a Parish Walk throughout Huntington to highlight key areas that were in need of attention. CWaC officers were invited but did not respond. 18 key areas were identified.

After submitting the report to Streetscene, CWaC Councillors other senior managers within CWaC, Streetscene asked to meet with Huntington Parish Council to carry out the Parish Walk, using the report as a guide.

Key Notes taken from the Meeting

- Restructuring Streetscene – Mr. Graham Jones explained that, earlier this year, there had been a restructuring of the Streetscene organisation. This was an 8 week period where nobody knew if they would have jobs or what capacity that would take. CWaC admit that, during this period, there was uncertainty and miscommunication.
- Budget Cuts – As a result of the restructuring, some key points should be noted.
 1. 21 frontline staff were made redundant.
 2. Streetscene are no longer to employ agency staff to cover other staff
 3. Effectively £1million has been cut from the Streetscene budget
 4. All work must come within budget and there will be NO overspend as in previous years
 5. Grass cutting was on a 3 week cycle BUT due to the restructuring and budget cuts, this will now be 5-6 week cycle.
 6. Hedges would be cut once a year from now on
 7. Resources had also been cut. For example, Mechanical sweepers had been reduced by half from 6 to 3 for the whole borough.

- Public Expectation – Despite the budget cuts and restructuring as discussed above, CWaC acknowledge that there has been no amendment to public expectation. This means that residents are still expecting the same level of service (frequency and quality) although Streetscene admit that this has now had to be reduced. The Clerk explained that Parish Councils are often treated like the ‘front line’ and are receiving a huge increase in the complaints received from the public so wouldn’t it be useful if Parish Councils, if not the general public, were made aware of these cuts to services as public expectation would then be more in line with the reality of the situation. Mr. Jones admitted that CWaC had briefly considered releasing a statement, as the Wirral Council had done, to explain the budget cuts but CWaC had decided against this. The Clerk asked that managers reconsider.
- Programme of Work – Cllrs asked if it would be possible that Parish Councils could be issued with a programme of intended works by Streetscene. E.g.: Specific hedges to be cut within the next 6 weeks. Mr. Brice said that this would certainly be something that could be looked into.
- Trees – This is no longer the responsibility of Streetscene. Mr. Adam Carpenter is the officer responsible for trees. CWaC would NOT cut trees at a height which required ladders etc. but they would do crown lifting from floor height.
- Quality of Work – Cllrs remarked that the quality of the work seemed to be affected. Mr. Jones stated that the rotary machines used to cut the grass was intended to keep the grass down and not to give it as neat finish as people would do at home. Grass cutting was observed on Chester Rd and both Mr. Jones and Ms. Brice said that was a standard that they expected despite Cllrs thinking it could be improved.
- Parish Council Responsibility – Cllrs asked if it was possible that Parish Councils could take on responsibility for areas. Mr. Jones said that this would be viewed favorably by CWaC. Obviously costings would need to be taken into account by the Parish Council.

Mr. Jones also warned that CWaC would probably be reluctant to take on NEW responsibility for green spaces and therefore greens pace on Saughton Camp, for example, would probably be taken on by the Parish Council in the future.

Cllrs asked if volunteers could be used if Streetscene were to provide the tools. Mr. Jones said that this would not be possible as volunteers would not be insured and there would not be enough resources. IF the Parish Council DID find volunteers to take on CWaC owned areas to cut, Streetscene would agree to come and collect the grass cuttings/waste etc.

- Private Property/Housing Developments – If a hedge, tree or shrub is privately owned (and this includes Housing developments still owned by developers) and is causing a hazard/danger to the public, CWaC could issue an enforcement notice. The owner then has 7 days to which to respond. IF the hedge etc. has not been cut within the 7 days, CWaC could carry out the work and then issue an invoice to the owner.
- Findings from Parish Council Report – Both Mr. Jones and Ms. Brice agreed that the 18 areas identified on the original report were in need of attention. Some were more urgent than others with the hedge on Chester Rd being in need of urgent attention. This would be dealt with within 2 weeks from this meeting.

Conclusion

Due to restructuring and budget cuts, Streetscene are no longer able to cut grass verges and trim hedges as often as they did last year. They are also reluctant to take on new responsibility. This

has an impact on us as a Parish Council who have to deal with complaints from residents. Consideration may need to be given to whether Huntington Parish Council would be willing to take on more responsibility for existing areas, new green spaces such as Saughton Camp which CWaC may be reluctant to take responsibility for and also how we communicate the budget constraints of CWaC to members of the public.

UPDATE ON 27TH November 2017 – Parish Walk with Mr. Mark Brazil (Streetscene Manager)

Present

Cllr Nick Dodd and Cllr Jacky Creswick – Huntington Parish Council

Mr. Mark Brazil – Senior Manager of Streetscene

Louise Gibson – Clerk of Huntington Parish Council

Purpose of the Meeting

After submitting the report to Streetscene, CW&C Councillors other senior managers within CW&C, Streetscene attended, with members of Huntington Parish Council to carry out the Parish Walk, using the report as a guide.

During that meeting, several commitments were made. Some of these were followed up whilst others weren't. Therefore, we then asked to meet with Mr. Mark Brazil.

Key Notes taken from the Meeting

- Councillors informed Mr. Brazil that one additional grass cut in Huntington was promised at the previous Parish Walk. Mr. Brazil said that the weather had seen the grass grow rapidly and another grass cut was scheduled. However, he did acknowledge that the grass was longer than acceptable and he would attempt to get another grass cut in Huntington but this was dependent on the weather.
- Mr. Brazil remarked that Streetscene were 'trying to maintain standards that had been kept before the staff cuts' but he acknowledged that this was impossible and priorities would have to be made and innovative ways to reduce demands on time, resources and staff. An example he gave was planning wild flowers in some areas so that grass would not need to be cut so often.
- Mr. Brazil outlined the following policy for enforcement of issues relating to overgrown hedges:
 1. Hedges (owned by CW&C) on a Highway of 40mph speed limit or above – Report to Highways
 2. **Any** Hedges owned by Private Ownership – Report to Highways who will issue enforcement. Do not report to Streetscene
 3. Hedges (owned by CW&C) on a Highway of 30 MPH speed limit or under – Report to Streetscene

- Councillors raised the issue of vehicles entering Caldy Nature Park to empty bins. Mr. Brazil suggested that this was acceptable practice. Staff were under tight time pressures and this may be quicker than walking to empty bins. Councilors' suggested that informing the public that there was a change in practice would have been advisable.
- Key Areas Highlighted as needing Action. All of this were agreed by Mr. Mark Brazil and confirmed that action would be taken.
 1. Caldy Valley Cycle path – Mechanical Sweeper agreed
 2. Old Post Office Path (Leading from Chester Rd, opposite the shops, CH3 6BT) to Caldy Valley Rd – Mechanical Sweeper agreed
 3. Old Post Office Path (Leading from Chester Rd, opposite the shops, CH3 6BT) to Caldy Valley (hedge on left hand side) – Mr Brazil agreed to discuss with Highways to serve enforcement on Manweb (Infringing Highway and obscuring light) or possibly have Streetscene to cut as goodwill gesture.
 4. Caldy Valley Rd (Opposite Trefoil Close) – hedge in desperate need of cut due to pedestrians needing to walk out into the road to get round. This is at the rear of Numbers 10 and 12 Lupin Drive. Can you please establish ownership and let us know?

Also: Slightly further down Caldy Valley Rd towards the nature park on the same side needs cutting. This is at the rear of Numbers 16 and 18 Lupin Drive. Again can we ask them to establish ownership and let us know?

 5. Tree Branches fallen at junction of Caldy Valley Rd and Gorse Way – Highab needed to clear. Reported on online portal on 16th October.
 6. Gorse Way (By Bus Stop) – Hedge infringing the pavement and pedestrians having to walk through muddy grass verge or on the road to avoid. This area on Gorse Way is at the rear of Numbers 9, 11, 15, 17 and 19 Sedum Close. Again can we please ask you to establish ownership and let us know?
 7. Path from Butterbur Close to Harebell – Street light obscured. In need of hedge trimming. Also from the cycle track and on the path leading into Harebell is the shrub overhanging the path that resident has complained about. It is at the rear of 25 Butterbur Close. You said that this was private ownership but you also said that you could do this as a gesture of goodwill, but again can we ask that you establish ownership and let us know