

SADBERGE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday 5th February 2008 in Sadberge Village Hall

Present: Councillor Scaife [Chair]
Councillors Best, Brown, Glew, Heywood, Schott and Vickers

In attendance: Councillor Brian Jones Alastair Mackenzie – Clerk
Excluding representatives from Darlington Borough Council, there were 60 names on the attendance sheet.

1. Apologies

There were no apologies. All the Councillors were present.

2. Declarations of interest in items on the agenda

The Clerk declared an interest in item 14 – Parish Plan.

3. Bus services to Sadberge

Simon Houldsworth, Darlington Borough Council's Transport Policy Manager, was present for this item.

3.1 Councillor Scaife summarised the background to this item.

- Darlington Borough Council's draft budget for 2008-09 includes a proposal to stop the subsidies for the #17 and #97 bus services.
- Sadberge residents are very concerned about these proposals.
- Sadberge Parish Council opposes the withdrawal of the subsidies for the bus services.
- At the Parish Council meeting on 14-Jan-2008, Richard Alty suggested that the bus services could be replaced by a community transport scheme. Simon Houldsworth has been invited to come and explain how such a scheme would work.

3.2 Sadberge Parish Council agreed to open up the meeting to contributions from the public.

3.3 Simon Houldsworth presented Darlington Borough Council's proposal for public transport in Sadberge.

- Darlington Borough Council's budget for 2008-09 is under pressure. There are three options:- (i) Reduce spending. (ii) Increase Council Tax. (iii) Increase fees and charges.
- The Council wishes to hear residents' views about the proposals in the draft budget. Written responses can be sent to the Borough Council at Darlington Town Hall.
- The draft budget will be considered at a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 19-Feb-2008, and the Cabinet's proposals will go to the Council meeting on Thursday 28-Feb-2008.
- Bus services #17 and #97 are expensive all-day contracts, and very few people use these buses.
- The #17 contract was set up fairly recently, after Arriva stopped its #98 service. There are 5 return journeys per day on the section of the route that is unique to this service. On average, 825 passengers board #17 buses in Sadberge each month. On one particular Monday a total of 20 tickets were sold for the 10 trips. Of these, 13 tickets were bought with concessionary fare passes.
- The #97 contract has been established for longer. There are 6 return journeys per day. On average, 321 passengers board #97 buses in Sadberge each month.
- The #17 and #97 bus services are run on a gross cost basis. That is, Darlington Borough Council pays the whole cost of running the buses and takes the revenue from the ticket sales.
- The subsidy amounts to £3.94 per trip for the #17 service and £3.71 per trip for the #97 service.

- Darlington Borough Council looked at other options for saving money, but felt that these subsidies have to be stopped in order to contribute to the required savings across all the Borough Council's services of £2.6M per year.
- In a community transport scheme a community organises its own transport.
- A community transport scheme can be more flexible in meeting the community's needs, because it avoids the needs to make compromises to meet other communities' needs.
- Costs are lower, and the organisation running the scheme can apply for grants that are not available to the Borough Council.
- The transportation is provided by a minibus driven by volunteers.
- A 16-seat accessible minibus would cost about £30,000 – £35,000.
- Volunteer drivers can be paid expenses. Depending on how the scheme is set up, drivers can be paid. The Transport Bill that is currently going through Parliament will extend the ability to pay drivers.
- A section 19 permit effectively allows a community to set up a "transport club". The minibus would not be allowed to ply for hire.
- A section 22 permit allows a community to set up what is effectively a bus service.
- Depending on the precise arrangements, it would be possible to use the minibus as a private hire vehicle.
- Over time, it might be possible to expand the scope of the scheme and start trading on a wider scale.
- The finances of the scheme would need to be supplemented by fundraising; e.g. jumble sales.
- As well as volunteer drivers, a community transport scheme would need volunteers to serve on the organising committee.
- The small core of people who currently use the bus services would not be enough to sustain a community transport scheme. The scheme would need to be used more widely by Sadberge residents. Where do people want to travel to?
- A community transport scheme requires full commitment from the community. If the community is not 100% committed then the scheme will fail.
- Darlington Borough Council would be prepared to provide interim financial support while a community transport scheme is set up.

3.4 The following points were made during the discussion:-

- Would volunteer drivers need PSV licences?
Simon Houldsworth: Under the permit system drivers do not need PSV licences. Holders of older car driving licences are allowed to drive vehicles with up to 16 seats. Minibus driver training is available.
- Why has the financial contribution from Reiver Homes not been mentioned.
Simon Houldsworth: The £30,000 contribution from Reiver Homes could be put towards the cost of minibus.
- Buses go along Whinfield Road every 10 minutes. Why can't one bus per hour be diverted through Sadberge?
Simon Houldsworth: The frequency of commercially operated buses along Whinfield Road is a hang-over from the days when Arriva and Stagecoach were competing in Darlington.
Darlington Borough Council has talked to Arriva about the possibility of diverting buses to go through Sadberge, but the cost would be the same as subsidising a separate bus service for Sadberge.
The owners of Durham Tees Valley Airport pay for the #737 airport bus service. They do not want to divert this service.
- Why not wait for the results of the current bus network review being carried out by Arriva and Darlington Borough Council? A Tees Valley bus network improvement scheme is also under consideration.

Simon Houldsworth: Darlington Borough Council is working with Arriva on Arriva's proposal to change the bus network. Information was gathered via questionnaires delivered to all Darlington residents, and Arriva has drawn up a suggested network for the Darlington area. Some of that network would operate on a commercial basis. Other parts would need to be subsidised. Sadberge would not be included in the commercial part of the network.

It is highly unusual for a Borough Council to work in partnership with a commercial bus company. Darlington Borough Council has put its trust in Arriva, which now has 99% of the bus service market (by trip) in Darlington.

- It is a disgrace that Darlington Borough Council is proposing that the money from Reiver Homes should be used to buy a minibus for a community transport scheme.
- When asked, none of the Cabinet members said that they would be willing to volunteer as drivers for a community transport scheme.
- While proposing to stop the £132,000 per year subsidies for the two bus services through Sadberge, Darlington Borough Council is proposing to continue to pay £168,000 per year to subsidise evening and Sunday services for unspecified parts of Darlington. Surely day-time buses to get people to essential services should take priority over evening buses to get people to social activities.

Simon Houldsworth: The evening and Sunday services are used by more people. The Borough Councillors have chosen to propose stopping the subsidies for the #17 and #97 services.

- Rather than receive free bus passes, some people would rather pay the fares and get a proper service.

Simon Houldsworth: Some of the reporting in the press has been misleading. It is likely that Darlington Borough Council will have to pay an additional £500,000 per year to implement the national bus pass scheme. It would cost an estimated £300,000 more per year if the bus passes could be used before 9:30 a.m.

- The Clerk to Sadberge Parish Council has produced a briefing note explaining why an effective public transport system is so important to Sadberge and what Sadberge residents need from a public transport system. This note is available on the Sadberge web site at www.sadberge.org.uk.
- A community transport scheme would not work for Sadberge. The people who would be needed to volunteer as drivers are off at work during the day, and some people do not see why they should act as unpaid bus drivers for the Borough Council. Sadberge needs a public transport scheme that is predictable and reliable, which is not possible with a volunteer-based system. Also people need to feel independent, which will not be the case if they have to ask volunteer drivers to make journeys.
- Does Simon Houldsworth believe that a community transport scheme would work for Sadberge?

Simon Houldsworth: Yes, provided that the community is 100% committed.

- What would it cost to provide a simple service between Sadberge and Darlington?
A bus service costs about £80,000 per year. Reducing the frequency of the service would not produce any savings. Once a bus and driver are being paid for, it makes sense to make full use of them.
- Why totally withdraw the subsidies for the bus services through Sadberge?

Simon Houldsworth: It has got to the stage that it's better to be honest and say that we can't afford to subsidise these buses.

A 2-hourly service doesn't really work for Sadberge. Because the service is inconvenient, the only people who use the buses are the ones who have no choice.

- Darlington Borough Council received a lot of money for the Local Motion initiative.

Simon Houldsworth: The money was a one-off Government grant that had to be used for the urban area.

Part of the money was used to enable Arriva to buy low floor buses when there was no commercial case for providing better buses. Now that Arriva has bought out Stagecoach there will be cost savings and Arriva will be able to buy more low floor buses.

- Why can Neasham get a bus service?

Simon Houldsworth: The #74 service is run on a mainly commercial basis, so it is not under Darlington Borough Council's direction.

- The #17 bus is not allowed to pick up passengers after Great Burdon.

Simon Houldsworth: Bus services subsidised by public money are not allowed to compete with commercial bus services. This would be "extraction of revenue" from the commercial bus company. Arriva has threatened to take court action if the #17 bus competes with its commercial services.

- The #97 bus picks up passengers all the way along Yarm Road.

Simon Houldsworth: The #97 bus has been established for longer. If it was being set up now then it might not be able to pick up passengers along Yarm Road.

- It seems that Arriva has the upper hand over the Borough Council. Who issues licences for bus services?

Simon Houldsworth: Operators register services with the National Traffic Commissioners, who are obliged to authorise the services provided that they meet the legal requirements. Borough Councils cannot prevent bus companies from operating bus services, except when there is a road safety issue, in which case the Borough Council can make an appeal to the Traffic Commissioners to withdraw permission for the bus service.

- Sadberge is about to lose its only shop and Post Office. People without cars will have no access to anything if the bus services are stopped.

- Are minutes of Sadberge Parish Council meetings seen by the Darlington Partnership and the people who carry out audits of the Borough Council? To what extent will these discussions be communicated to relevant people?

Simon Houldsworth: The Borough Councillors are aware that a decision to cut bus services cannot be made lightly.

Brian Jones: Every Cabinet member is fully aware of Sadberge residents' views on this issue.

- Would a community bus service be able to pick up passengers along Arriva's routes?

Simon Houldsworth: Arriva would probably object.

- Which other villages are having their bus services removed?

Simon Houldsworth: The villages served by the #97 bus. Bishopton, Great Stainton, Royal Oak, etc.

- One resident already has to pay half her wages in taxi fares when she works at weekends. If the bus services are stopped then she will have to give up work.

- What are Sadberge residents getting for their Council Tax payments?

3.5 In a show of hands, those present unanimously agreed that a community transport system would not meet the needs of Sadberge residents.

3.6 The following points were made during further discussion:-

- It should be possible to configure a bus timetable to give a better service to Sadberge, and thereby attract more passengers. For example, route the early morning service via Whinfield to enable children to get to Whinfield Primary School. Do more frequent, shorter runs so that people do not have to wait around for two hours when they go to the Felix House Surgery in Middleton St. George.
- Stockton Borough Council has a successful Community Transport Unit. Would it be possible to for Darlington Borough Council to run a community transport scheme that would meet the needs of Sadberge residents?

3.7 With the support of those present, Sadberge Parish Council agreed the following resolutions:-

- Sadberge Parish Council rejects the community transport scheme proposal, because such a scheme would not meet the needs of Sadberge residents.
- Sadberge Parish Council will make the case to maintain a bus service that meets the needs of Sadberge residents.

- Sadberge Parish Council will continue to consult with Darlington Borough Council about providing a public transport service that meets the needs of Sadberge residents.

3.8 It was agreed to distribute a note to all Sadberge homes informing residents about the outcome of these discussions, encouraging residents to make their views known to the Borough Council, and letting people know about the option to attend the Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 19-Feb-2008 and the Darlington Borough Council meeting on Thursday 28-Feb-2008.

ACTION: A Mackenzie

3.9 Councillor Scaife thanked Simon Houldsworth for coming to the meeting and giving a very careful explanation of the community transport option. It is important for the Parish Council and the residents to be able to make informed decisions about this subject.

3.10 It was agreed that Sadberge Parish Council will organise transport to enable people to attend the Cabinet meeting on 19-Feb-2008 and the Borough Council meeting on 28-Feb-2008.

ACTION: A Mackenzie

4. Darlington's Sustainable Community Strategy

Yvonne Ramage, Countryside Access Officer in Darlington Borough Council, was present for this item.

4.1 Yvonne Ramage presented a number of options for the route of the proposed new bridleway / cycle path to link Sadberge to Middleton St. George and Darlington.

- It will be necessary to obtain external funding for the new bridleway. Options include Natural England, Cycle England, Sustrans and the National Lottery.
- In addition to the proposed new bridleway, Darlington Borough Council is proposing to construct a safe cycle route between Sadberge and Darlington. This will be a utilitarian cycle route running along the north side of the A66 to reach the underpass near the Great Burdon roundabout.
- See Appendix 1 for the route options.

4.2 The following points were made during the discussion.

- If it goes ahead the new bridleway will have a semi-sealed surface made from crushed dolomite. This surface will be suitable for road bikes.
- "Right to roam" applies to the new South Burdon Community Woodland.
- Would it be possible to link up with the bridleway at Catkill?

Yvonne Ramage: There is more information about Darlington Borough Council's future plans in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Alastair Mackenzie will put a link to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan on to the Sadberge web site.

ACTION: A Mackenzie

- The relevant landowners have shown very limited enthusiasm for the proposed new bridleway. They have concerns about trespassing, vandalism, gates being left open, etc.
- The footway on the north side of the A66 between Beacon Hill and the Great Burdon roundabout is in poor condition. The Clerk will contact Darlington Borough Council's Highways Department about this.

ACTION: A Mackenzie

4.3 In a show of hands from those present, there was equal support for options #1 and #3. There was a little support for option #4, and no support for option #2.

4.4 Those present were supportive of the idea of creating a new bridleway linking Sadberge to Middleton St. George and Darlington.

4.5 Yvonne Ramage will continue to work on the new bridleway, and will keep Sadberge Parish Council informed about progress.

4.6 Councillor Scaife thanked Yvonne for her work on this project on behalf of Sadberge.

5. Minutes of the last meeting

In the minutes of the meeting on 14th January 2008 were agreed to be a true record of the meeting.

6. Matters arising

- 6.1 There has been no further news about the application to site a temporary dwelling on the land near Beacon Hill.
- 6.2 The Dale Road residents who have been feeding feral cats in their back garden have decided that they do not wish to participate in the exercise to trap and neuter the cats. We will therefore revert to the plan to feed and trap feral cats in the back garden of the empty bungalow at 10 Dale Road. Representatives of the National Animal Sanctuary Support League (NASSL) have continued to be very helpful.
- 6.3 The Clerk has still to give the relevant resident the contact details of the people who administer the allotments. **ACTION:** A Mackenzie
- 6.4 The Clerk has still to ask the Sadberge Village Hall Association for permission to use the village hall stage area for the refurbishment of the plaque from the village green. **ACTION:** A Mackenzie
- 6.5 Discussion of the map of the footpaths around Sadberge was deferred until the next meeting.
- 6.6 Alastair Mackenzie has submitted comments on the draft Sustainable Community Strategy, including the point that Darlington is a Borough that contains a market town, not just a market town.

7. Darlington Borough Council's draft budget for 2008-09

- 7.1 As well as the proposal to withdraw the subsidies for the #17 and #97 bus services, Darlington Borough Council's draft budget also includes a proposal to stop the grants to parish councils from 2009-10.
- 7.2 The following points were made during the discussion:-
- Sadberge Parish Council's precept would need to be increased by 92% to make up for the loss of the grant from the Borough Council.
 - Councillor Brian Jones has opposed the proposal.
 - Withdrawing the grant effectively subjects Sadberge Council Tax payers to double taxation.
- 7.3 It was agreed that Sadberge Parish Council strongly objects to the proposal to withdraw the grant. The Clerk will write to Darlington Borough Council to inform them of the Parish Council's objection. **ACTION:** A Mackenzie

8. Darlington Local Development Framework

- 8.1 Comments on the Core Strategy: Issues and Options document need to be submitted by Friday 15-Feb-2008.
- 8.2 With respect to Issue 7: Darlington Settlement Pattern - Where Should Development Go?, it was agreed that Sadberge Parish Council strongly opposes any development outside Sadberge's current development limits. The Clerk will submit this comment to Darlington Borough Council. **ACTION:** A Mackenzie
- 8.3 It was agreed that the Clerk will, in consultation with Councillor Scaife, submit additional comments in line with the Sadberge Parish Plan 2007. **ACTION:** A Mackenzie

9. Closure of Sadberge Post Office

- 9.1 It has been announced that Arthur Sanders is retiring as Sadberge Postmaster and Sadberge Post Office and Shop will close on 10-Apr-2008.
- 9.2 Sadberge Parish Council is grateful for the long-standing and excellent service provided by Arthur and Meg Sanders, who have recently been keeping the Post Office open in the face of great adversity. Councillors are sad that the Post Office is closing, but entirely understand Arthur and Meg's decision, and wish them well in their retirement.
- The Clerk will write to Arthur and Meg Sanders to let them know the Council's feelings. **ACTION:** A Mackenzie

- 9.3 The Clerk will contact Felix House Surgery to find out what will happen to delivery of prescriptions to Sadberge once the Post Office closes.
ACTION: A Mackenzie

10. Proposal to build wind farms at East and West Newbiggin.

- 10.1 A company called Pure Renewable Energy is considering the possibility of building nine wind turbines at East Newbiggin and two wind turbines at West Newbiggin.
- 10.2 It was pointed out that the names of the proposed locations are misleading. The "East Newbiggin" site is actually near West Newbiggin, and the "West Newbiggin" site is nearer to Great Burdon.
- 10.3 The Clerk reported that he had contacted Alan Irvine, the Managing Director of Pure Renewable Energy, to find out more about the proposals. Alan Irvine had given the following information:-
- The company is currently carrying out a technical and commercial feasibility study on the two sites. They have not yet come to any decision.
 - A scoping report has been sent to a number of organisations – e.g. the MOD, Durham Tees Valley Airport, the RSPB, the CPRE, etc. – for comment.
 - If Pure Renewable Energy decides to go ahead with the project then there will be public consultation in about three months.
 - Pure Renewable Energy recognises that Sadberge residents will be major stakeholders in the project.
- 10.4 The following points were made during the discussion:-
- This project needs to be watched very closely. Things will happen very quickly.
 - There will be no benefit to Sadberge.
 - There are issues of visual impact and noise, and there could be a significant negative impact on property prices.
- 10.5 The Clerk will monitor the project and keep Councillors informed of any significant developments.
ACTION: A Mackenzie

11. Condition of the village green at Spring Garth and the road leading to Well House

- 11.1 The Clerk has asked Darlington Borough Council to repair the road leading to Well House, to install a kerb along the side of the road adjacent to the village green at Spring Garth and to level off the mound of earth that has been thrown up by heavy vehicles.
Darlington Borough Council has agreed to repair the road, but has said that from their point of view there is no need for a kerb, and that dealing with the mound of earth on the village green is Sadberge Parish Council's responsibility.
The road has been marked for repair, but the marked area only covers some potholes and not an adjacent area where the edge of the road has subsided.
- 11.2 The Clerk will ask Darlington Borough Council to extend the scope of the road repair to include the section that has subsided.
ACTION: A Mackenzie
- 11.3 The Clerk will again ask Darlington Borough Council to install a kerb along the edge of the road adjacent to the village green.
ACTION: A Mackenzie
- 11.4 The Clerk will ask Richard Bond if he is still willing to level off the mound of earth on the village green.
ACTION: A Mackenzie

12. Missing posts at the edge of the village green

- 12.1 Two of the posts that Darlington Borough Council installed at the edge of the village green have been knocked over.
The Clerk has asked Darlington Borough Council to replace the two missing posts, but the Highways Department has said that it is not their responsibility and the Street Scene team have not yet responded to the latest email.
- 12.2 The Clerk will continue to try to get Darlington Borough Council to replace the two missing posts.
ACTION: A Mackenzie

13. Calor Village of the Year competition

Discussion of Sadberge's entry for the National Calor Village of the Year Competition was deferred until the next meeting.

14. Parish Plan

14.1 The Parish Plan flyer has been delayed. The Clerk will co-ordinate with Councillor Brian Jones to ensure that the Parish Plan flyer is not issued at the same time as Brian's Ward Councillor's newsletter. **ACTION:** A Mackenzie

14.2 The Parish Plan Steering Group will meet to consider what can be done to mitigate the effects of the closure of the Sadberge Post Office and shop.

15. Planning

15.1 The Council noted the outcome of the following planning application:-

- Planning application 07/00940/LBC was granted.

16. Approval of payments

The following payments were approved:-

- | | |
|--|---------|
| • Colour printing for the Parish Plan | £153.00 |
| • Subscription to the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) | £59.00 |

17. Correspondence

The Council noted the following correspondence:-

- Letter from the Department for Communities and Local Government about consultation on Orders and Regulations relating to the conduct of Local Authority members in England.
- Letter from the Audit Commission regarding the appointment of an external auditor for the Council.
- Letter from A-one Integrated Highway Services about bridge refurbishment work on the A1(M) near Darlington.
- Letters from two seven-year-old Sadberge residents about the possible loss of the bus services to Sadberge.

18. For information

18.1 There appears to be a problem with an excavation at the junction between Norton Road and Norton Crescent. The Clerk will investigate and inform the relevant authority.

ACTION: A Mackenzie

18.2 Hill House Lane will be closed between Sadberge and Bishopton Lane for up to three weeks starting on Monday 11-Feb-2008 while carriageway refurbishment work is carried out.

19. Clerk's conduct

Councillors pointed out that during the presentation on the proposed new bridleway (item 4) the Clerk should not have led the meeting by giving "thumbs up" and "thumbs down" signs at various points during the presentation. The Clerk should remain impartial during Council business.

The Clerk apologised to the Council for his actions during the presentation on the proposed new bridleway.

20. Next meeting

The next meeting of Sadberge Parish Council will be held in Sadberge Village Hall at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday 4th March 2008.

Alastair Mackenzie
Clerk

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 5th FEBRUARY 2008

I hereby certify that these minutes are a true record of the meeting.

Signed: Councillor M Scaife _____ Date _____