

Council Meeting 29 July 2021

Agenda Item CC2230/21

Cooperation with Three Rivers District Council

Introduction

This paper considers how the Council should respond to a proposal from Three Rivers District Council concerning cooperation.

Considerations

Councillor Stephanie Singer of Three Rivers District Council ("TRDC") suggested, in an email dated 16 June to Cllr Mitchell, establishing regular meet-ups between District and Parish Councillors. Cllr Mitchell agreed that such meetings would be a good idea and expressed a preference for them to be face-to-face, and asked that the matter of the Red Cross centre be given priority¹. Cllr Dominic Sokalski, in a further email of 26 June, then built on Cllr Singer's initiative by emailing all CGPC councillors with a similar purpose. Both emails are reproduced in the appendix.

The initiative appears to have some roots, according to Cllr Sokalski's text, in the District Council being required to produce a new Local Plan with building targets that conform to government imposed quotas. Delivery of the numbers of new builds is unlikely to be achieved without significant encroachment onto Green Belt, and district councillors are seeking to mobilise local support to reduce the target. CGPC shares this concern. Cllr Sokalski also refers to a duty to work together, which CGPC would echo and the fact that "there is a lot going on" which is undeniable.

This council has a complex relationship with the principal authority based on a number of historic issues, including:

- Not being vested with open spaces on formation
- Not being vested with allotment gardens
- The contract to maintain The Green and Stone's Orchard being framed disadvantageously to the Parish Council and being unremunerated.
- A sense that the District Council does not consider the Parish Council to be a credible provider of services to residents.
- The lack of openness in dealing with emotive matters such as the future of the Red Cross centre
- Failure to engage cooperatively, even on trivial matters such as increasing the size and extent of the bund round The Green, or maintenance of the multi sports court on Barton Way
- An impression gained over the years that the principal authority has no interest in engaging with the parish over such matters.

¹ A meeting has been arranged between the Red Cross working group (Cllrs Mitchell (chair), Gallagher and Cole) and TRDC councillors on 21 July.

However, in order to deliver best value for the residents of the village, it is clear that a certain level of cooperation is essential and, for example, in the domain of planning where the Council is a statutory consultee, local knowledge and the existence of a Neighbourhood Plan has been successful in improving the outcomes in a number of cases.

The development of a new Local Plan and the consequential update of Croxley Green's Neighbourhood Plan is a very good opportunity to work together for the benefit of residents.

We have a general responsibility to cooperate for the benefit of our residents, underscored by the Nolan principles that, inter alia, require us to be objective, acting and taking decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias. Dispassionately, a cooperative approach to shared problems ought to be more constructive than an adversarial attitude.

Agreeing to meet and to discuss issues is a no-risk decision as such meetings will be forums for exchange of ideas and information that might lead to positive outcomes, not for decision-making.

Recommendations

- That Council welcomes the initiative proposed by TRDC to improve communication for the benefit of residents
- That Council approves creation of a group comprising the chair and vice chair of council with the chairs of P&D and LEE to meet with TRDC councillors to discuss issues of mutual interest from time to time. Other councillors may attend.
- That Council requests the group reports, briefly, the outcome of each meeting to the next Full Council.
- That the arrangement continues while the group believes the benefits outweigh any perceived disadvantage.
- That Council confirms that the group has no delegated authority.

Cllr Nigel Cole
July 2021

Appendix

Email 1

From: Stephanie Singer

Sent: 16 June 2021 15:45

To: Chris Mitchell <CllrCMitchell@croxleygreen-pc.gov.uk>

Subject: Meeting up

Dear Chris

I hope you are well, and 'enjoying' this heat!

As you know, we have our Local Area Forum tomorrow, and I'm sure we will cover a lot of ground about the issues in Croxley.

Something we should like to establish, are regular meet-ups between District and Parish Councillors. These will enable us to discuss matters as they arise, and hopefully work together on them.

Would you and your colleagues be happy to do this, say every couple of months and initially on Zoom?

Do let me know, and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

Best wishes

Stephanie

Email 2

From: "Dominic Sokalski (Councillor)" <Dominic.Sokalski@threerivers.gov.uk>

To: GCPC Councillors

Cc: Croxley Green District Councillors

Sent: 26/06/2021 10:25:21

Subject: District-Parish Councillor Catch-ups

Dear Parish Councillors,

I'm getting in touch to explore whether there would be an interest in having regular and informal catch-ups between District and Parish Councillors. I am hoping to improve communication between the two Councils which had been made a lot harder with Covid restrictions (that are hopefully expiring next month). These meetings don't have to have an agenda or be minuted, but rather an opportunity to openly ask what is going on, for us to consult with you on local matters and simply to get to know each other better. They could even be at the pub!

At TRDC Full Council on 25 May motion we passed a motion to remove some sites from the draft Local Plan consultation that was been widely commented on, but there was an additional, and I think overlooked, line in the motion:

"To work with local Residents' Associations, Parish Councils and others to continue to press the government for a reduction in the government's target for the number of homes to be built in Three Rivers and for additional powers to determine the mix and tenure of new homes in order to better meet the needs of local people."

There is a lot going on and I think as elected Councillors we have a duty to work together - it is what residents would surely expect.

If I've missed anyone out (I can't find an email for Cliff) please forward this on!

Please let me know your thoughts.

Kind regards,

Dominic