

MOBILE HOME RESIDENTS FORUM

Monday 13 May 2013

Present:

Councillor Heather Morris (Chair)
Councillors D J Henson

Also Present:

Jan Grundy	- Exonia Park
Colin Hughes	- Exonia Park
Val Ewings	- Exonia Park
Mr P North	- Newport Park
Alan Southard	- Newport Park
Julie Wale	- Ringswell Park
Malcolm Thomas	- Ringswell Park
Graeme Guy	- Ringswell Park

Also Present:

Environmental Health Manager, Licensing Solicitor and Assistant Democratic Services Officer (Committees)

In Attendance:

Inspector Andrew Webber	- Devon & Cornwall Constabulary
Martyn Rogers	- Age UK Exeter

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Geoff and Wendy Threlfall (National Association of Park Home Residents), Councillors Bull, Leadbetter and Hannaford.

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2013 were agreed, subject to the change of wording 'It was suggested that the owners did not carry out any consultation with the residents and that the facility has been closed without following the correct procedure' to 'It was *stated* that the owners....'.

Matters Arising

Cornwall Council had adopted references to Park Homes rather than caravan. Although caravan was the legal definition and had to be used for the purposes of enforcement, it was agreed that all communications in future would relate to Park Homes.

Minute No. 7 – Updates on current legislation

It was reported that the Mobile Homes Act had gained Royal Assent, although certain provisions would not be enforced until April 2014. Further details would be provided under Any Other Business.

TO WELCOME MARTYN ROGERS, AGE UK EXETER

The Chair welcomed Martyn Rogers, Director of Age UK Exeter to the meeting.

Age UK Exeter provides advice, support and guidance to the over 50s, and it was considered helpful to have a presence at this Forum to gather awareness of problems faced on mobile sites, and to see if Age UK Exeter has a role in supporting this group and to help wherever possible.

A member advised that Cornwall Council had distributed safety leaflets at their Forum. Age UK Exeter produce the Sauce Magazine which contains articles about leisure, sport, services etc, and Martyn advised that he was happy to provide members of the Forum with copies. An information advice service is also available from Monday to Thursday between 10am-1pm. Telephone enquiries were welcome on 01392 202092. 2,500-3,000 enquiries were received every year.

Age UK produce fact sheets for owners/prospective owners of park homes - <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/home-and-care/housing-choices/park-homes/>. Any comments on the factsheet would be gratefully received.

Reference was also made to funding for safety locks. Martyn advised that this funding had now ceased, but they could try their best if possible.

Inspector Webber reported that there were no specific crime issues being reported in park homes. He suggested giving the Forum a higher media profile as the meeting was a positive step. It was noted that an article was placed in the Express & Echo when the Forum was first formed, but the Chair would speak to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement to see how the profile could be raised.

Reference was made to parking problems within park home sites in relation to emergency vehicle access. A member had invited the Fire Service to undertake one of their training sessions at their park site to ascertain if access could be easily gained, but he had not received a response to date.

Inspector Webber advised that parking enforcement is subject to whether it is on private property. It was also noted that although it is included in the park rules, untaxed vehicles can be used on site if it is private land. He suggested that any issues should be addressed with the park owner. However, a member stated that the park owner was not present on site 24/7 and he would be writing to the Chief Fire Officer.

It was noted that the Fire Prevention Team would be attending the next meeting, so these issues could be raised at that time.

MODEL SITE LICENCE

As all sites currently have different conditions, it was proposed to use the Model Site Licence so the same standards are applied to all parks, except for Ringswell Park which would also include the condition imposed on it by the Court. By having a model standard for all sites, it would make the enforcement procedure easier.

Members made comments around semi-detached homes, porch doors and height of fences, but it was agreed that members should email any comments or suggestions for change. Responses would then be collated and the revised

document would be distributed prior to the next meeting in order for agreement to be reached at the meeting.

There is a requirement for formal consultation, to include site owners.

15 **REPORT BACK FROM CORNWALL PARK HOME RESIDENTS MEETING ON 15 MARCH 2013 - MALCOLM THOMAS AND VAL EWINGS**

Val Ewings reported on the visit to Bodmin to attend the Cornwall Park Home Residents meeting in March.

Cornwall are responsible for 63 sites, including caravan sites, limited and fully residential sites.

The councillors had acknowledged that there had been a lack of action in the past, and there was commitment from the Council's officers. There were representatives from Trading Standards, Police and Fire Service. There was also acknowledgement that there was a need for more local meetings, and for the smaller groups to have representatives from each to attend the county-wide meeting.

It was suggested whether a similar set-up could take place in Devon, but noted that Cornwall is a single enforcing authority and covers all sites within Cornwall. If a similar county-wide forum was set up in Devon, it may be more difficult as there would be different approaches for different areas as there are numerous licensing authorities involved. There may, however, be an opportunity to meet on a more social level.

Information was made available on smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.

Grants had been awarded towards the setting up of the residents park home association which helped with costs towards computers and printers etc.

Community grants are also available for projects in Exeter. Each ward has £2,000 available and the maximum that can be applied for is £300. Decisions on ward grants are made by the councillors in each ward. The grant could be used to set up a residents association, the cost of room hire to hold meetings etc. Extonia Park had submitted a bid which had been approved to help with the running costs of their association.

Councillor Morris also gave a presentation on the Exeter Forum.

16 **PARK HOMES IN CORNWALL - A RESIDENTS GUIDE TO SERVICES**

At the previous meeting, it had been agreed for members to look at the 'Park Homes in Cornwall – A residents guide to services' booklet to see if consideration should be given to producing something similar in Exeter.

Following discussion, it was felt that although this was a useful guide, it was a general leaflet rather than for Park Homes. Martyn Rogers advised that Age UK had access to numerous factsheets which would cover these issues.

GREEN DEAL

Keith Williams reported that the Green Deal had replaced the energy efficiency grants scheme. Energy companies would be replacing grants with loans.

He was currently in discussions with one energy company specifically in relation to park homes and would report back further at the next meeting.

Malcom Thomas advised that Green Deal South West would be visiting their park in order to provide more information on what it entails.

He also encouraged members to apply for energy grants if aged 70+ and income is no more than £15,000 per annum. There could be a £135 discount on utility bills.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Issues to be discussed at the next meeting were agreed:

- Fire Prevention Team – safety and carbon monoxide
- Trading Standards – Enterprise Act
- Energy Efficiency – Keith Williams
- Procedure for varying site licences – Elaine Kale

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Site Licence

A query was raised on the display of the site licence in a prominent position. It was suggested that this should be raised when comments are submitted in relation to the Model Site Licence.

Building Inspector

A question was raised in relation to new park homes, and whether a building inspector should visit the site.

It was noted that park homes are not covered by building regulations, and if there were problems, then Trading Standards should be involved.

It was suggested that these issues could be raised when Trading Standards attend the next meeting.

Plot Plans

An ongoing incident was referred to in relation to the marking out of pitches.

The Chair advised that she had written a report which had been presented to Councillor Hannaford (Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Involvement), Assistant Director Environment and Environmental Health Manager. The proposals had been agreed, and would be discussed outside of the meeting as it is not a Forum matter.

Tree Preservation Orders

Reference was made to a Tree Preservation Order, where trees had not been replaced. No acknowledgement had been made to the objection.

Elaine Kale advised that there are powers to purchase and replace trees. This particular case was investigated and noticed was served, which was not complied with. It was noted that a replacement tree would cost in the region of £3,000 to import and transport and it was not deemed to be a good application of public funds, particularly when there was a risk that the tree would be felled again. There was no evidence on who felled the tree so no prosecution can take place.

Mobile Homes Act

The Mobile Homes Act had now gained Royal Assent.

The site rules will come into force on 26 May 2013.

The main legislative changes such as fees, local authority discretion on applications to transfer the licence, right of appeal, and compliance notices will come into force on 1 April 2014.

The requirement for the manager of the site to be a fit and proper person had no implementation date yet.

A question was asked around selling a home and whether permission is required from the owner or agent to vet the new person buying the property. It was noted that as from 26 May 2013 the occupier is entitled to sell the mobile home and assign the agreement to the person to whom the mobile home is sold without approval of the owner.

A copy of the Mobile Homes Act would be distributed to all members for information.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING - MONDAY 23 SEPTEMBER AT 2.15PM

The date of the next meeting was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 2.15 pm and closed at 3.54 pm)

Chair