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Highways manager wants cooperation not conflict

Surrey County Council's Highways Manager for Waverley, Simon Hall, told a meeting of Busbridge Community Forum on 26 June that he has little faith in public consultations.

Speaking at the start of a lively discussion session organised by the Forum, he said, "I do need people's opinions but I don't want conventional public consultation because that implies that I've got all the answers. What I prefer is public engagement – I would like you to tell me what you need for your area."

He explained that in the past consultations had been based mainly on expensive feasibility studies offering residents only a limited range of options.

Mr Hall told the meeting, "For example, six years ago Surrey brought forward schemes for residents' parking schemes and for improving road safety – the feasibility studies and consultations cost a lot of money and caused a lot of concern. But not much got implemented – they just went round and round on the details of design with nobody particularly happy with any of it."

He pointed out that over the eighteen months he has carried the highways responsibility, he has tried to focus more on delivery, and less on consultations and studies. He works with a policy task force of elected members of both the Surrey and Waverley authorities. They have started by addressing the parking situation in South Godalming, and urgent highway improvements.

Later in the meeting Mr Hall acknowledged that residents were likely to object to schemes if they had had no input into the ideas. The answer to this, he believes, is to give each street in the area the chance to put up a representative to attend discussions to spell out the particular local difficulties and try to find compromises that would harmonise with neighbouring streets.

Responding to Mr Hall's suggestion that the Forum might be asked to organise such street-by-street research, Forum Chairman Mike Harrison said, "It's no small task but it is exactly the kind of community-building networking the Forum was intended to serve. Faced with the choice of parking and other highways changes being negotiated or having them imposed, I'm certain common sense would prevail – the Forum has already demonstrated Busbridge's willingness to work alongside the authorities to find win-win outcomes."

ENDS

Notes to editors

Busbridge Community Forum was founded in October 2006. It serves an area in the residential streets to the south of the town of Godalming, covering the districts of Busbridge, Holloway Hill, Crownpits and Bargate Wood. Residents can exchange information and express their views to the authorities through the forum.

Forum meetings are held approximately four times a year and there is also a lively exchange of views by e-mail. Residents can sign up for an e-mail list.

The forum is independent and non-political. It does not serve sectional interests or seek to usurp the function of other organisations within the area. Its function is to provide a focus for inclusive community action and help residents communicate their views to the authorities, including councils, the police, Royal Mail, road authorities and licensees in the area.

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