

## **Report to Copeland Borough Council Meeting on 25 September 2007**

Millom and Haverigg have suffered for years as a result of under investment which is evidenced by the number of commercial and residential properties standing empty and gradually falling into disrepair. This decline commenced in the 1960's with the closure of the steel works, since when Millom's elected representatives have been a voice in the wilderness crying out for help. There has also been a lack of will by Copeland's current administration to address the desperately poor infrastructure that contributes to the decline of the area. No high profile campaign has been mounted to draw the County Council, Environment Agency and Minister for the NW's attention to what is little short of a national disgrace, where a population of 11,000 can only be accessed from the M6 by one road which may be reduced to gridlock by two large vehicles approaching each other from opposite directions at particular bottlenecks. Other roads (to Barrow and Whitehaven) are even worse being scarcely wide enough for the modern juggernauts that ply between the different centres. Whilst accepting that W. Cumbria is the most remote sub region in England the 'Master Plan for W Cumbria' immediately dilutes that statement by claiming that new forms of communication, technology and economic regeneration are making geographical boundaries less important. The chances of attracting further business and industry into the area are restricted by the difficulties experienced ~~by~~ in moving goods from the area to other parts of the country.

In respect of the residential housing stock, this Council's policy of excluding all but owner occupiers of at least three years standing from accessing improvement grants results in our preventing first time buyers gaining access to some of the lowest priced property in the area with the advantage of help from improvement grants. This, together with a failure to introduce targets for bringing such properties back into the residential stock, seems to be diametrically opposed to the overall regeneration policy and has played a significant part in the general air of decay within the town.

It is clear that the deterioration of residential and commercial stock is closely related to the foregoing problems. Other solutions need to be considered if there is no hope of major road improvements such as the Duddon estuary crossing in the foreseeable future. One possibility is the repair and upgrading of the wharf at Millom which could provide an alternative route for exporting goods to the UK, Irish and Continental ports, as well as providing an attractive route for tourists into the area. This would not be such an unreasonable proposition when one considers how many island communities off the coast of Scotland, with substantially smaller populations, benefit from investment to this end. Taking heavy goods by sea would have the effect of creating further employment in the area and of reducing the volume of commercial traffic upon a road that is clearly unfit for purpose.

No recent attempt seems to have been made to engage in conversation with British Rail to determine whether or not there might be some opportunity for running a regular freight car with the normal passenger timetable to pick up light goods along the route between Whitehaven and Barrow. Also whether or not a branch line might be constructed thus enabling heavy goods to be more economically transported on this

route.

To this end one would have expected that Copeland Council would have been lobbying for such initiatives long before now. Pledging five years of the funding from the unnecessary Leader's PA post, together with a promise from the Executive not to embark on further expensive 'jollies', would provide us with adequate funds for a full time lobbyist for several years.

Tourists and visitors to Millom and Haverigg, approaching from the north will pass two partially completed bungalows, the bare walls and roof trusses of which have stood for two years as a gaunt reminder of one of many examples to the ineptitude of this administrations planning policies. It appears that when the footings were inspected no-one checked the dimensions and angles in accordance with the plans submitted. Further on they will note that there are no footpaths either side of the road leading into Millom, therefore, pedestrians can only enter the town on foot by way of a muddy dirt track alongside the main road. The only alternative to this is to make the perilous choice of walking in the road.

Those branching off to Haverigg from this point will eventually find their way to one of the most beautiful beaches in the country which, due to bungling by this administration, does not have the national recognition, in the form of a yellow flag, that would otherwise proudly announce it's undisputed quality. Yet the five year plan proudly boasts of this flag flying over the beach at this time.

There are many further examples of maladministration that have contributed to the area's decline, including those bungalows and houses in Estuary close and Lancashire Road that are blighted by contaminated land. Here the planning department failed to attach conditions for the developer relating to testing for pollution and, where necessary, carrying out remedial works prior to building. Conditions they should have put in place as a requirement of the Contaminated Land Act 1990 in which the guidance is quite specific.

No attempt was made, prior to the transfer of housing stock to Copeland Homes, to ensure that dropped kerbs were in place for elderly residents in the Devonshire Road bungalows. Now we are entirely dependent upon that Housing Association to ensure that the work is funded thus alleviating the plight of, as an example of one of many cases, an elderly lady with chronic emphysema who is trapped in her bungalow except when able to enlist the help of able bodied relatives and friends to physically carry her to transport waiting at the kerb. The flats in Rottington Road which have been boarded and semi derelict for years are still causing endless problems for residents in the vicinity.

Elsewhere we have a farcical situation where some residents are charged £10 per annum for pedestrian access onto a dirt track at the rear of their properties, yet which has a footpath running through it and thus giving free access to everyone else. We also have a situation where those currently without a brown bin service can only have one bin, regardless of the size of their garden, even though other areas have residents who are assured they can keep the two bins they were issued with. In other words some council tax payers will be expected to subsidise others benefiting from a more

privileged service.

Newtown and Holborn Hill appear in the bottom 25% of wards in England in the index of multiple deprivation compared with levels of unemployment and Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disability Allowance. The amenities being provided in South Whitehaven (that is performing arts) by the Job Centre Plus organisation with the support of Copeland do not appear to be being made available to the people of Millom despite these levels of deprivation. It would seem, therefore, that deprived people in the Millom and Haverigg area are being discriminated against simply because they don't live in Whitehaven. There is even consideration being given to transporting 1,595 potential participants from areas around Whitehaven to the venues. It seems incongruous that the organisation responsible for closing the Job Centre Plus facility in Millom is now being aided by this very administration in discriminating against the jobless and other deprived peoples as a consequence of this project.

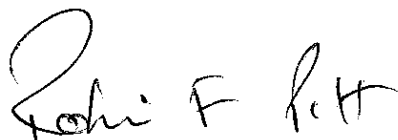
Perhaps the most obvious example of this administrations indifference to the situation at Millom is their apparent reluctance to enforce their own planning regulations in the district. There can be no clearer example of this than the mobile burger bar that has been sited beside the Somerfield Supermarket since May of this year even with planning applications having been refused by both the Town Council and Copeland Borough Council. Despite being advised of this months ago, and following endless complaints, the Council has failed to prevent the proprietor of this bar from trading. Meanwhile local traders, who have to pay business tax, watch as the trader in question turns profits at their expense.

Work on replacing the CCTV cameras in Millom should have commenced in April 2007 but there is no sign of this happening. Meanwhile reports of anti social behaviour increase and there is no satisfactory way of identifying the culprits with the existing, and out dated, cameras.

Clearly there are causes for serious concern here: examples of bungling and incompetence and illustrations of a total lack of direction and corporate control. Our only hope, and the real purpose of this report is to draw the Council's attention to a much neglected area of the Borough and to encourage Members and Officers to start thinking 'outside the box', thereby encouraging original and lateral thinking as a way of generating solutions to Millom and Haverigg's escalating problems.

## **Recommendations**

That this Council endorses the content of this paper and promises a fair deal for the people of Millom henceforth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin F. Platt'. The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.