

## DUDLEY BOROUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2007 at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 1 at the Council  
House, Priory Road, Dudley

### PRESENT: -

Mr T Antill, Mr D Bates, Mr D Davies and Mrs C Freer and Mr D Woodruff.

### Officers:

Mr K Clements – Countryside Manager, Mr D Jacobs – Project Engineer:  
Traffic and Transportation, Ms K Perkins – Public Rights of Way Access Officer  
(All Directorate of the Urban Environment, Dudley MBC) and Mr R Jewkes,  
Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Law and Property, Dudley MBC)

### 1 CHAIRMANSHIP OF MEETING

It was noted that as the Chairman of the Forum was not in attendance, the Vice-Chairman, Mr Woodruff would be chairing the meeting.

### 2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr Cutler, Mr Freer, Ms Ward, Mr Williams and Mr Yeates.

### 3 MINUTES

AGREED

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Forum held on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2007 be approved as a correct record.

### 4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In connection with Minute No. 6 – Black Country as an Urban Park, Mr Clements reported that there had been no further developments in respect of the project since the Forum last met. Details of the bids which had progressed to the television vote stage of the competition would be announced during October, and the progress of the Black Country bid would be reported at the next Forum meeting.

In connection with Minute No. 8 – Secretarial Services, it was noted that Mr Jewkes, Democratic Services Officer, had now assumed the role of Secretary to the Forum, and that he and Mr Clements would be meeting prior to the next meeting of the Forum to discuss the management of future meetings in more detail.

In connection with Minute No. 9a – Coombeswood, Members expressed concern regarding safety at the site, particularly in view of the steepness of the path and the potential danger to young cyclists. In responding, Mr Jacobs reported that although he had not visited the site in the last few weeks, he had received assurances that a programme of works would be undertaken shortly, including the blinding of the path, some iron works and the installation of various barriers and markings.

In connection with Minute No. 9b – Trehearns Farm, a Member commented that, following the approval of the application to redevelop the site, the area was likely to become increasingly popular with young people. Concern was expressed that the increased potential for the riding of motorcycles in the vicinity was a real safety concern, and it was suggested that the installation of squeeze barriers could combat this.

In relation to the report on Trehearns Farm submitted by Mr Freer at the last meeting of the Forum, Mr Clements reported that whilst copies of the report had been sent to the relevant Councillors and Council officers, work was still ongoing to establish the 49 individuals/agencies who had commented on the planning application, in order that copies could be circulated to them.

In connection with Minute No. 13 – Dog Control Orders, Mr Clements reported that further to the request that a member of KC Dog be invited to join the Forum, he had forwarded copies of the DBLAF membership and terms of reference to that organisation in the hope that one of their members would be interested in joining. He gave an undertaking to update the Forum of any developments in this regard.

In connection with Minute No. 15a – Coombes Bridge, Mr Clements reported that members of the Coombeswood Canal Trust would be doing general maintenance and clearing encroaching vegetation from the footpaths adjacent to the bridge over the weekend of 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> October.

## 5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member declared an interest in any matter to be discussed on the agenda.

## 6 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

It was noted that as only 5 Members of the Forum were in attendance, meaning that the meeting was inquorate, it would not be possible to appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair for the ensuing year. This item was therefore deferred to the next meeting of the Forum.

## 7 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

It was agreed that as these matters had already been discussed under Agenda Item 4 – Matters Arising From the Minutes, no further discussion was required at this time.

## 8 GATING ORDERS

Mr Jacobs reported that as no objections had been received to the proposed Gating Order relating to Gornal Wood Crematorium, the Order had been confirmed, with staff at the facility due to install a gate shortly.

In relation to the proposed Order recently advertised in respect of Ridgewood Primary School, Mr Jacobs reported that whilst none of the relevant national organisations had objected to the proposals, Mr Antill had raised a number of issues in respect of the proposed Order. It was hoped that these would be resolved shortly in order that the proposal could be progressed.

In responding, Mr Antill stated that whilst he had received a letter from Dudley MBC Legal Services responding to the points he had raised regarding the proposals, he felt that the response had not adequately addressed his concerns and that consequently, at the moment, he did not feel able to withdraw his objections. Mr Jacobs stated that both the Cabinet Member and the Director of Children's Services supported the proposed Order.

## 9 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Ms Perkins reported that following discussions at previous meetings of the Forum, paragraphs dealing with performance monitoring and implementation had now been included in the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Copies of the latest draft of the document would be printed shortly, with a formal consultation period beginning on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> October.

## 10 SCHEDULING OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Due to the meeting being inquorate and therefore unable to make binding decisions, consideration of the future scheduling of Forum meetings was deferred to the next meeting.

Arising from consideration of this matter, Members discussed the current funding arrangements relating to the Forum. It was noted that at present costs associated with the Forum were met from existing operational budgets. Several Members commented that in order for the Forum to raise its profile and discharge its functions properly, it would be necessary to identify an individual dedicated budget to pay for training, expenses and external services like press notices.

### AGREED

1. That an agenda item entitled 'Budgets and Funding for Forum Activities' be included to be discussed at the next meeting of the Forum.
2. That Mr Clements be requested to contact the Cabinet Member for Transportation to raise the issue of funding for the Forum and pass on Members' comments regarding the possibility of establishing an individual, dedicated budget to meet expenses associated with its functions.

## 11 MEMBERSHIP

Further to comments made at the previous meeting of the Forum regarding the poor attendance records of certain Members, and the overall low turn out at meetings, Mr Clements circulated a table detailing the attendance record of all Members since the commencement of their memberships.

Arising from their consideration of the information, Members made a number of suggestions which they felt could improve attendance at meetings. These included the following: -

- Contacting those Members with particularly low attendance levels to ascertain whether or not they wished to continue to serve as a Member of the Forum.
- Engaging the Dudley Canal Trust and inviting them to appoint a representative to sit as a permanent Member of the Forum.
- Placing an advertisement in the local press or via the Dudley MBC website to raise awareness of the work of the Forum and seek new Members.
- Publicising the work of the Forum through the Dudley Walks to raise awareness of its works and attract new Members.
- Publishing all Forum documents (agendas, reports and minutes) through the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS) in order to increase public awareness of the Forum and enable the public to read about its work and feed into the process.
- Producing an annual report which would be circulated to all Members of the Council and other interested parties in order to improve the visibility of the Forum.

#### AGREED

1. That the issue of Forum membership and the suggestions outlined above for improving attendance and public awareness of the work of the Forum be discussed further at the next meeting.
2. That prior to that meeting Mr Jewkes liaise with Mr Clements to discuss further the publication of Forum documents on the Council's CMIS system.

#### 12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Jacobs reported that the Council was currently engaged in discussions with developers regarding the proposed redevelopment of Stourbridge town centre, in particular the area known as the Crown Centre. He reported that as part of the plans for the area, the Council was seeking to improve cycle access by including extra cycle storage space and cycle lanes where

appropriate. He undertook to update the Forum as appropriate as the plans and related planning applications progressed.

Mr Davies raised a concern in relation to 'shared surface' development. He stated that the contemporary increase in high density development was leading to the widespread use of single carriage pathways/parking areas which acted as 'shared surfaces' being used for access by both vehicles and pedestrians. He commented that this type of arrangement created major safety issues for the disabled and people with impaired vision or hearing. Consequently, many of the national organisations representing these groups were campaigning against 'shared surface' developments on the grounds that they were dangerous to vulnerable members of society. He requested that the Council take these problems into account when considering new developments in Stourbridge and elsewhere.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was AGREED that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2007, at 6.30pm in Committee Room 3 at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley.

The meeting ended at 8.35pm

CHAIRMAN