

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Monday, 14th November, 2005 at 7.00 pm
at Redhill School, Junction Road, Stourbridge

PRESENT:-

Councillor Adams (Chairman)
Councillors Attwood, Banks, Mrs Collins, Donegan, Jones, Kettle, Knowles, Musk, Rogers, A Turner, Vickers and C Wilson; Mr G Downing and Mr P Singh.

Officers:-

Director of Law and Property (as Area Liaison Officer); Head of Public Protection, Project Manager, Senior Engineer – Traffic, Senior Conservation Officer (Directorate of the Urban Environment); Group Accountant, Support Services, Principal Accountant (Directorate of Finance), Assistant Director Access and Inclusion, Area Youth and Community Worker (Directorate of Children's Services) and Mrs. J. Rees (Directorate of Law and Property).

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr D Harcourt, Stourbridge Chamber of Trade, and approximately 30 members of the public, were in attendance at the meeting.

37

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 12th September, 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed.

38

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Attwood declared a prejudicial and personal interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item No 9, in view of his being related to the applicant in respect of the joint development scheme at Enville Street, Stourbridge and his membership of Valley Road Youth Centre, respectively.

Councillor Mrs. Collins declared a prejudicial and personal interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item No 12, in view of her son being a Director of the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust.

Councillor Donegan declared a personal interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item No 9, in view of his membership of the Committee of the Valley Road Community Centre.

Councillor Rogers declared a personal and prejudicial interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item No10, in view of his membership of the Scout Association and his membership of 15th Stourbridge Scout Fund Raising Committee, respectively.

Councillor Vickers declared a personal interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item No 9 in view of his membership of the Committee of the Valley Road Community Centre.

39 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Cowell, Mrs Martin and Ms P Shepherd

40 RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

It was reported that a petition had been submitted from approximately 8,000 residents of the Stourbridge area, opposing the proposed closure of Beauty Bank School. This was referred to the Director of Children's Services for attention, and would be considered by the Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning at the meeting of the Cabinet on 17th November 2005.

41 CO-OPTED MEMBERSHIP

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted seeking consideration of arrangements for the replacement of Mr Coggan, as a co-opted member. Mr Coggan had advised that he had recently taken up employment with the Council and was therefore no longer eligible to be a co-opted member of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted about the ineligibility of Mr. Coggan to be a co-opted member of the Committee, be noted and that the Area Liaison Officer send a letter of thanks to Mr Coggan for his hard work whilst being a co-opted member of the Committee.

42 YOUTH ISSUES

There were no youth issues to be discussed at this meeting.

PUBLIC FORUM

Before reading questions from the public the Area Liaison Officer stated that any questions which were not addressed at the meeting would receive a written response from the appropriate officer.

Questions and answers were then given as follows: -

- (1) A member of the public queried the feasibility of the pathways and cyclepaths in the Withymoor area being cleaned by the Council's motorized pavement sweeper, fortnightly, to prevent the encroachment of moss and other vegetation on the surface of the pathways, as this action loosens the surface and eventually creates potholes. The Senior Engineer, Traffic and Transportation undertook to investigate the query and send a written response to the questioner.
- (2) In response to a request that some meetings of the Committee be held in the Amblecote/Withymoor area to enable local residents to attend, the Area Liaison Officer advised that suitable venues were always being sought, but that any venue used had to fulfil a set of laid down criteria, including accessibility by public transport. Venues within the Withymoor area would be investigated for their suitability.
- (3) A member of the public advised that, in his opinion, some of the issues set out in Minute No. 8 for the meeting of this Committee held on 12th September 2005, had not been completed, in particular the prevention of access by motor vehicles over the Seven Dwellings Bridge, which it had been acknowledged was the responsibility of British Waterways. The Senior Engineer, Traffic and Transportation undertook to arrange a meeting with the questioner and British Waterways to investigate and address concerns referred to.
- (4) A member of the public sought the views of the Committee on the proposal within the Primary Schools Review to close Beauty Bank School. Members of the Committee responded as follows:

Councillor Mrs. Collins advised that in her view Beauty Bank school was much needed, especially as it was a school which catered for children with special educational needs. Since the proposals were first announced, it had been a very traumatic time for parents and children.

Councillor Attwood advised that it would be a sad loss to the local community if Beauty Bank school closed. If there were any alternatives to closing the school these should be investigated.

Councillor Rogers advised that it would be a sad loss if the Beauty Bank school were to close, but that funding for education needed to come from somewhere. The subject was still subject to debate and no decision had yet been made.

Councillor Donegan advised that he would await the completion of the consultation before coming to any conclusion. He believed it would be a sad loss to the area, but funding was an issue, The issue of funding was a government issue.

Councillor Vickers advised, that as Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning, it was his job to make the decision and that when made, he would be submitting his decision to the meeting of the Cabinet on 17th November 2005. He was still considering all the comments and suggestions received during the consultation period.

Councillor Knowles advised that he had visited the Beauty Bank school which was a wonderful school, but that the issue of vacant spaces in the Borough needed to be looked at as a whole, and not just one school in isolation.

Councillor Kettle endorsed the comments made by Councillor Knowles. He also pointed out that if savings were not made the Council would face criticism from OFSTED and have sanctions imposed on it by the Government.

Councillor Banks advised that although no one wanted to see any school closed the Council was in a very difficult position and would have to try to do its best for everyone.

Councillor Musk advised that although no one wanted to see any school closed it was inevitable that some would have to close, due to the falling birth rates. He had an open mind at present and would await the conclusion of the consultation.

Councillor Jones advised that he believed a lot of the correspondence published in the press and e-mails sent to the Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning, blaming the Conservatives for the proposed closures, was in fact sent in from other political parties trying to make political gain from the situation. The Council, whilst taking into account the needs of children, also needed to be aware of funding issues, which were due to the government's formula for funding children's education. Schools with small numbers would no longer be viable. If the consultation period had been extended, as had been suggested, parents and

children would have faced an even longer period of uncertainty. He believed that more information was needed before any final decision could be made. He also stated that as the issue of falling numbers had been known since 2000 action should have been taken previously. Whatever decision was made, the best interests of all the children of the Borough needed to be of the utmost.

Councillor Wilson stated that no one wanted schools closed, particularly Beauty Bank, which provided a good education for local children. No decision would be made until the end of the consultation period.

Councillor Adams advised that he was not happy with the consultation process. He believed there was a need for more information and answers to questions. In his view the proposed cuts should have been made by the previous administration.

Councillor Adams reiterated that no decision would be made until the Cabinet meeting on 17th November 2005. He also advised that the final decision would be taken by the Schools Organisation Committee in January 2006.

STOURBRIDGE IN BLOOM

Mr Harcourt and the Stourbridge Town Centre Manager gave a presentation on "Stourbridge in Bloom", which had resulted in Stourbridge being given a silver award in 2005.

The Silver Award was the direct result of two years work, in partnership with the Council, local businesses, traders, schools and colleges, who had worked together to help improve the appearance of the Town.

Arrangements were already in hand to encourage other partnerships with a view to improving a broader area of the Town, including the installation of planters, seats and general tidying up projects. Anyone wishing to participate would be encouraged and advised on the way forward and on how to become involved.

In response to comments regarding the unkempt state of a small piece of land at the entrance to the Crown Centre, the Chairman advised that this particular piece of land was not in the ownership of the Council. It was hoped that the owner could be encouraged to improve the area.

In response to comments by a member of the public, Councillor Donegan advised that Lye Councillors had already commenced plans for improvements to Lye.

The Chairman advised that businesses, residents and schools within the Withymoor area could become involved in the project, if they so wished.

RESOLVED

That Mr Harcourt and the Stourbridge Town Centre Manager be thanked for the presentation, the contents of which were noted.

45

APPLICATIONS IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

(Having previously declared a prejudicial and/or personal interest in this agenda item, Councillors Attwood, Donegan and Vickers withdraw from the meeting during its consideration).

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted in respect of land and property owned by the Council.

In response to queries from the Committee, in the matter of the application regarding land at Enville Street, Stourbridge, the Area Liaison Officer undertook to investigate the viability of including Knoyle Court, as shown on the plan attached to the report.

Councillor Jones confirmed that nothing would be happening to the land currently occupied by the Leaving Care Team, until such time as suitable alternative accommodation was identified. The Area Liaison Officer advised that there was a need for this facility to be relocated in Dudley.

On consideration of the report submitted and comments made thereon, it was

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Lifelong Learning be advised to approve the granting of the wayleave agreement, at Valley Road Youth and Community Centre, Providence Street, Stourbridge, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, subject to terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Law and Property.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be advised to approve the application for a joint sale of the surplus land following construction of the new road at Enville Street, Stourbridge, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, subject to the disposal of the said land being deferred until the Director of Children's Services has found a new alternative location for the Leaving Care Team and

that the Cabinet Member for Law and Property be recommended to approve the appropriation of the surplus land at Enville Street, Stourbridge, to planning purposes.

46

CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

(Having previously declared a prejudicial interest in this agenda item, Councillor Rogers withdrew from the meeting whilst applications for a capital allocation were considered).

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on five applications for capital funding from the Committee's Capital Allocations budget.

Upon consideration of the report and comments made thereon, it was

RESOLVED

- (1) That the 15th Stourbridge Norton St. Michael's Scout Movement be granted an extension to the 31st March 2006, for claiming their grant, to allow time for the applicant to obtain the result of the lottery bid, and that, should the lottery funding be granted, to enable them to take up the grant.
- (2) That the following amounts be awarded to the organisations stated:-

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Stourbridge Cyber Bus Project	Replacement engine for one bus and a new engine and associated costs.	£3,021
Stourbridge Cricket Club	Removal of existing wooden window frames at the club pavilion and replacement by PVC units	£5,000
Friends of St. Mary's Communal Garden	Towards cost of providing secure wrought iron fencing around perimeter of the communal garden and that the timescale for collection of grant be extended to twelve months to allow remaining funding to be obtained from alternative sources.	£5,000

- (3) That the application made by the Norton Social Club be refused, in view of the surplus of net assets shown in its latest accounts.
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47

THE ERNEST STEVENS TRUST - FINAL ACCOUNTS

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted seeking approval of the accounts of the individual Trusts comprising the Ernest Stevens Bequests as indicated in the report submitted and authorisation for the Chairman to sign the accounts and annual returns on behalf of the Committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the audited final accounts of the Ernest Stevens Trust, as now submitted, be approved.
- (2) That the Chairman be authorised to sign the accounts and annual returns on behalf of this Committee.
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48

LYE AND WOLLESCOTE CEMETERY CHAPEL

(Having previously declared a prejudicial interest in this agenda item, Councillor Mrs Collins withdrew from the meeting during its consideration)

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted advising on progress in relation to the future of the Chapel.

Members of the Committee expressed their appreciation of the work already undertaken by the West Midlands Historical Buildings Trust in respect of the Chapel.

In response to a query from a member of the public, the Area Liaison Officer advised that the Council would do whatever was appropriate to prevent any further deterioration of the building.

In response to a Member of the Committee's request for consideration to be given to the health hazard caused by pigeons in the Chapel, the Engineer Traffic undertook to have the matter investigated.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Director of the Urban Environment be advised:-
- (a) to approach the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust to request that they apply to the Architectural Heritage Fund for grant assistance to undertake a Feasibility Study on Lye and Wollescote Cemetery Chapel

- (b) to explore internally, potential sources of money to fund the full 100% cost of undertaking a feasibility study or to provide a 25% contribution towards the cost of the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust undertaking the feasibility study.

- (2) That a progress report on the above matters be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

49

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on written responses made to questions asked at previous meetings.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

50

ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Stourbridge Crematorium

Councillor Adams updated the Committee on the outcome of a recent meeting with Officers of the Directorate of the Urban Environment when it had been agreed to canvas users of the cemetery on whether they favoured the new or old system of access to the building. Information had still to be received and a written report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

51

DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates and venues of future meetings were reported as follows:-

30th January, 2006 at 7.00 p.m. at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge.

20th March, 2006 at 7.00 p.m. at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge.

The meeting ended at 8.20 p.m.

CHAIRMAN