

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday 6th September 2006 at 7 pm
at Redhill School, Stourbridge

PRESENT:-

Councillor Adams (Chairman)
Councillors Attwood, Banks, Mrs Collins, Mrs Cowell, Donegan, Jones, Kettle, Knowles, Lowe, Rogers, A Turner, Mrs Walker and C Wilson and Mr G Downing

OFFICERS:-

Director of Law and Property (as Area Liaison Officer), Head of Public of Protection, Section Engineer, Town Centre Manager, (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Group Accountant (Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement) Licensing Officer and Mrs J Rees (Directorate of Law and Property)

IN ATTENDANCE:-

There were approximately 30 members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Martin, Mr I Green, Miss R Hill and Ms P Shepherd.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Donegan declared a prejudicial interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda Items 7 b (Application for Freehold Title of Unit 5 Bromley Street, Lye, Stourbridge) in view of the solicitor for the applicant being a family friend and Agenda Item 8 (Capital Allocation - Lye Town Football and Social Club) in view of his membership of the Club and left the meeting during consideration of these matters.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

- (1) That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19th June 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to addition of Councillor Lowe to the list of attendees.

- (2) That the minutes of the Special Meeting of the Committee held on 3rd July, 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the inclusion of an apology by Councillor Mrs Walker.
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31 RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

It was reported that a petition had been submitted on behalf of the Compton Road Residents Association requesting the closure of a path at the top of Buckbury Close.

The petition was referred to the Director the Urban Environment for consideration and attention.

32 YOUTH ISSUES

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

33 PUBLIC FORUM SESSION

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

The following question and answers were then given:-

1. A member of the public, who was unable to attend the meeting, requested comments from Members of the Committee, regarding a proposal to build a superstore within 1 kilometre of Stourbridge.

The Area Liaison Officer advised Members of the Development Control Committee that they should not comment on any planning issue which could later become a subject for consideration for the Development Control Committee.

Regarding the proposal,

- a view was expressed that whilst the original and previously resubmitted application by Tesco had included possibilities for regeneration and integration with the Town Centre, the latest proposed application did not.
- there was a need for regeneration of the Stourbridge Town and for traffic management around the Ring Road.
- there was a need to encourage visitors and new businesses to the town and to develop outside of the Ring Road area.
- it was unacceptable for Tesco to hold the town to ransom.

- proposals for a surface level crossing, as indicated on the application referred to, were not viable.

The Chairman also read out a statement, advising that a revised planning application had been received on 21st August, 2006, details of which were available for viewing either on the Council's web pages or at 3 St James' Road, Dudley. He encouraged anyone who had any comments or objections to address them to Development Control at 3 St James' Road, Dudley.

2. A member of the public asked whether the Council would have sufficient funding for legal costs, should Tesco take the Council to a tribunal, if the application were to be refused.

The Area Liaison Officer advised that any legal costs had to be borne by the Council in the event of any challenge, provided the decision went against the Council. He emphasised that no judgement or prejudgement had been reached on the planning application and that all comments and/or objections should be submitted in the usual way. At the appropriate time the Development Control Committee would consider the application entirely on its merits and make an informed decision.

3. A member of the public asked whether there were still plans to divert the River Stour. The Chairman advised that this suggestion had been abandoned.
4. A member of the public expressed the view that Tesco should not receive planning permission for a store in Stourbridge, as, in her view, Brierley Hill had never recovered from the opening of a superstore many years ago in Brierley Hill.

APPLICATIONS IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

A report to the Director of Law and Property was submitted, regarding land and property within the Committee's area.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Leisure be advised to refuse the application to purchase land adjoining 42 Market Street, Stourbridge, as shown hatched on the plan attached to the report submitted, for the reasons set out in the report.
 - (2) That the Cabinet Member for Personnel, Legal and Property be advised to approve the application to purchase the freehold title of Unit 5, Bromley Street, Lye, Stourbridge, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, on terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Law and Property.
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CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

In introducing his report, the Area Liaison Officer, conveyed congratulations to all those involved in the bid for Stourbridge in Bloom, which had received the Silver Gilt award. The Area Liaison Officer also advised that the Friends of Mary Stevens Park had expressed their appreciation to the Committee for the grants from both the Committee's capital allocations budget and the Stevens Trust for funding towards the cost of new railings on the Norton Road side of Mary Stevens Park. The work had now been completed.

He also advised that due to circumstances beyond their control, the Quaker Society had been unable to take up the grant allocated in March 2006 within the usual six months. He therefore requested that the Committee consider extending the time for claiming the allocation by three months, until 20th December 2006.

The Area Liaison Officer reported that the balance of the unallocated capital budget was now £31,727.29. Stourbridge Age Concern group had claimed less than their approved allocation. The resulting funding had been returned to the Committee's Capital Allocations budget account.

In response to queries from some Members of the Committee, a representative of the Cats Protection organisation advised that the Post Office box for the Branch was Brierley Hill, on account of the Group's secretary living in that area and working as a volunteer from home. He also advised that the premises where the photocopier would be located, as well as the operating office, was in High Street, Lye. He confirmed that following recent break-ins, the photocopier would be kept in a locked room at the back of the premises and would be coded to enable only those in possession of the code to use the machine.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Quaker Society be granted an extension to the 20th December, 2006, for claiming of their grant.
- (2) That the sums referred to below be allocated to the following organisations for the purposes indicated, subject to any necessary confirmation by the applicants to the Area Liaison Officer that the balance of the required funding had been secured:-

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Stourbridge and District Branch, Cats Protection	Purchase of a photocopier	£1,462.88
Lye Town Football and Social Club	Cost of resurfacing the car park at the Club in Stourbridge Road, Lye	£5,000

AREA COMMITTEE CONSULTATION IN RELATION TO THE GAMBLING ACT 2005 AND DRAFT POLICY

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted on a draft Statement of Licensing Policy, produced in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005, which vests the Council with new and extended responsibilities, for licensing premises following the transfer of functions, from the Magistrates Courts to the Council. The Act is scheduled to come into force in September, 2007.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the content of the report and the draft Statement of Principles, in relation to the Gambling Act 2005, as attached as Appendix 1 to the report submitted, be received and be noted.
- (2) That the Licensing and Safety Committee be advised that the Committee has major concerns:-
 - (a) over the principles of the Gambling Act 2005,
 - (b) about the Council's capability to enforce the Act without imposing an additional financial burden on Council tax payers,
 - (c) regarding the ability of the Council and its partners to help vulnerable people with gambling problems.

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on a proposed extensive public consultation on a possible scheme for the introduction of traffic management measures between Stourbridge Ring Road and the Birmingham/Sandwell boundary in Quinton as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted. Plans indicating the proposals were displayed at the meeting.

Members of the Committee commented on the need to avoid traffic travelling at excessive speeds. Concern was expressed over whether adequate funding would be available to enforce the proposed traffic management measures when current measures were not being enforced. It was commented that the consultation should take into account improvements to roads and the impact on businesses along the proposed route.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be advised of the Committee's support for, and comments on, the commencement of a public consultation exercise regarding the introduction of traffic management measures along the A458 route between Quinton and Stourbridge Ring Road, via Halesown and Lye.

ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

- (a) Councillor Donegan advised that he had received a response from the Post Office to his letter regarding concerns that Post Office staff were dropping elastic bands whilst delivering the post. The response put the blame for the dropping of the elastic bands on the public and not Post Office employees.
- (b) Councillor Banks raised the issue of information on access to public buildings in the light of the Disability Discrimination Act. The Director of Law and Property advised that much work had been done and would continue to be done to make Council owned public buildings more accessible to people with disabilities. The Council's Disability Access Strategy document was available on the internet and the Director of Law and Property undertook to meet with Councillor Banks to discuss the Council's approach in more detail.
- (c) Councillor Mrs Walker expressed frustration at the long delays and inconvenience being caused on the A491 at Amblecote, due to work being carried out on the former gas works site. She was particularly disappointed that the recent International Glass Festival had been adversely affected by the severe lack of access to certain sites within the Festival. She expressed concern that the Council had no control over the hours of operation of statutory undertakers in that they did not work at night times or weekends, which resulted in work taking longer to complete, causing disruption and inconvenience to local residents.

The Senior Engineer for Traffic undertook to write to British Gas, the National Joint Utilities Group and the Highway Authority and Utilities Committee, expressing concerns about the Statutory Undertakers' lack of efficiency and the disruption being caused to residents.

- (d) Councillor Mrs Walker also expressed the hope that Dudley could again host other such prestigious festivals, as the International Glass Festival, which had encouraged large numbers of visitors to the area. She expressed gratitude, on behalf of the Festival Organisers, for the capital allocation that had been granted by the Committee for the Festival.
- (e) Councillor A Turner expressed appreciation that recent work on the alignment of the Amblecote High Street and side streets had been carried out simultaneously with the work on the A491, which was much appreciated.
- (f) Councillor Jones expressed concerns, on behalf of residents of Brook Road, regarding parking on the zig zag hatching in close proximity to their homes. The Senior Engineer for Traffic, undertook to visit the site with residents and Councillor Jones to investigate an agreeable solution.

- (g) Councillor Jones also expressed concerns regarding a recent planning application by Oldswinford Hospital School for a change of use for 30 acres of green belt land at Treherne's Farm for use as playing fields, as he understood that under recent new legislation such a change, could ultimately lead to buildings being erected on the site. The Head of Public Protection, Directorate of the Urban Environment, undertook to investigate and send a written response to Councillor Jones.
- (h) Councillor Mrs Cowell advised, on behalf of the Stourbridge Town Hall Working Group, that refurbishment of the Stourbridge Town Hall together with the new tiered seating had been completed. An opportunity to view the refurbished Town Hall was to be organised in the very near future and the public were invited to attend.
- (i) Councillor Mrs Cowell also advised that a Stourbridge Town Hall Events booklet was now available.
- (j) Councillor Knowles advised on the forthcoming opening of Lye Cemetery and Chapel, as part of the West Midlands Heritage weekend. He encouraged the public to attend, to view the building and to consider and express suitable suggestions for the future use of the Chapel.

A member of the public questioned whether the building would be safe for visitors, and Councillor Knowles advised that he was sure that members of the public would not be invited to attend unless the building was considered safe.
- (k) Councillor Kettle requested a map, showing land involved in respect of a recent planning application by Redhill School to enclose part of the school playing fields. The Head of Public Protection Directorate of the Urban Environment undertook to send details of the application to Councillor Kettle.

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RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted in responses to questions asked at the meeting of this Committee in June 2006.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report submitted be noted.

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SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

Information was given regarding the dates for future meetings of all Select Committees, which were held at the Council House, Dudley. Members of the public were welcome to attend such meetings.

RESOLVED

That the dates of future meetings of Select Committees be noted.

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DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates and venues of future meetings of the Committee were noted as follows:-

10th October 2006 at 7.00 pm Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge - Special Meeting to discuss Proposed Late Night Traffic Management for Stourbridge High Street on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 11 pm to 4 am.

20th November 2006 at 7.00pm at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge.

22nd January 2007 at 7.00pm at Red Hill School, Junction Road, Stourbridge.

12th March 2007 at 7.00pm at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.

CHAIRMAN