

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Monday 17th November 2008 at 7.00 pm
At Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge

PRESENT-

Councillor A Turner (Chairman)

Councillors: Adams, Banks, Barlow, Mrs Cowell, Jones, Lowe, Martin, Mrs Rogers and Mrs Walker.

OFFICERS:-

Director of Law and Property (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health; Group Engineer - Traffic and Road Safety (Directorate of the Urban Environment); Assistant Director of Children's Services (Without Portfolio) and the Detached Youth Worker - Early Years Youth and Community (Directorate of Children's Services); Assistant Director – Libraries and Archives and Adult Learning and the Area Community Renewal Officer (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services) and Joan Rees (Directorate of Law and Property).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Approximately 50 members of the public were in attendance at the meeting.

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CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

In welcoming everyone to the meeting, the Chairman congratulated Mr Polychronakis on his recent appointment as Interim Chief Executive and wished him well in his new role. It was reported that in consequence of Mr Polychronakis' appointment, Jane Porter, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Without Portfolio) would take as Area Liaison Officer to the Committee.

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APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Attwood, Hanif, Kettle, Knowles and C Wilson.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member declared a personal or prejudicial interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in respect of any items on the agenda.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd September 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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YOUTH ISSUES

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

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PETITIONS

It was reported that the following petitions had been submitted and referred to the officers indicated for consideration and attention.

- (a) By Councillor Mrs Walker, on behalf of residents of Keats Close, Amblecote, expressing concerns regarding vandalism and anti social behaviour on the right of way from Amblecote Recreation Ground to the Corbett Hospital and requesting closure of the path. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration.
- (b) From Mr M Pearson, on behalf of the Oldswinford Neighbourhood Watch, expressing concerns regarding hazardous parking at Church Road, Oldswinford and requesting double yellow lines to be introduced around the corner of Church Road/Priory Road on both sides of Priory Road. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration. Mr Pearson circulated a map indicating the problems.
- (c) From Mr F Dudley, on behalf of market traders, objecting to the Council's proposals to close the Farmers' market in Stourbridge and requesting the closure of Stourbridge High Street and the relocation of the Farmers Market into the High Street. Mr Dudley stated that signatures were being collected until 6th December, at which time a full and complete petition would be submitted for consideration. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration.

Councillor Adams, as Cabinet Member for the Transportation, pointed out that it was not the Council who were closing the farmers market, but rather the decision of LSD Promotions'. He had recently spoken with interested parties and the Stourbridge Town Centre Manager regarding this matter and further discussions were to take place in the near future.

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 raised a number of concerns regarding the repairs to the gates at Mary Stevens Park. He also referred to various correspondence between himself and the Head of Museums on issues which he had raised. He also referred to reports in the national press that lottery funding would be allocated to the South East until after 2012. In response, the Assistant Director, Planning and Environmental Health advised that, as requested previously by the Committee, the Council were working towards a Heritage Lottery Fund bid which was to be submitted by February 2009. They were also working on Option B which the Committee had resolved to support, should the Lottery Fund bid be unsuccessful. Specialist advice had been sought regarding the nature of the repairs and detailed reports had been received. Details of the report had been sent to the questioner.
- (2) The same member of the public raised concerns that the sum of £5,000 had been spent erecting Braille notices in squash court areas of Leisure Centres. In response, the Assistant Director, Planning and Environmental Health, advised that the Council had a duty to provide an equal access facility to all. She undertook to send a written response to the questioner on other issues raised in his letter.

Cllr Banks, as Champion for persons with sight impairment, advised the Committee that all signage should be readable by everyone, regardless of their disability.
- (3) The same member of the public also queried whether reports he had heard that the new Brierley Hill parallel route budget would be overspent were correct. In response, the Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health, advised that the project was on time and on budget.
- (4) A member of the public raised concern at the lack of a progress report, referred to in Minute 34 of the Committee's meeting held on 3rd September, regarding an issue raised by Councillor Mrs Cowell regarding the Stourbridge Cemetery. He also questioned the length of time required to prepare a report. The Assistant Director Development and Environmental Protection, advised that the matter referred to had been discussed with Councillor Mrs Cowell and was the subject of further consideration.

- (5) A member of the public expressed concerns that the date of the meeting had been published incorrectly on the Council's webpage and at the lack of agenda papers available for members of the public at the Stourbridge library. It was explained that when this query had been raised earlier in the day, the website had been checked and the information contained on it had been correct. Agenda papers were also available on the Council's website, as well as in the library. Anyone finding no hard copy of the papers available in the library could request a copy from Democratic Services. The Area Liaison Officer advised that in future additional copies would be made available at the Stourbridge library.
- (6) A representative of the Stourbridge Township Council commented on the need to have discussions with the local colleges regarding the possibility of including tutors and mature students of the colleges in the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens park, to ensure the work was completed within the agreed five year period, and for assurance that the work would be carried out by a specific date, should the lottery bid fail. In response, a Member of the Committee requested that this item be deferred until Agenda Items. 10 (Capital Allocations) and 11 (Ernest Stevens Trust – Applications) as he intended to make a proposal under those agenda items.
- (7) In response to a question as to how much cash was available from funds bequeathed by Ernest Stevens for repairs etc for the Mary Stevens park, the Area Liaison Officer advised that approximately £15,000 per year interest was earned on the capital, which currently was awarded as grants to local organisations.

This amount of money, even over a number of years would not be sufficient to cover the cost of repairs to the gates and therefore the Heritage Lottery Fund application was being prepared, as indicated earlier. Work was also ongoing on Option B.

Concerns were expressed that in the current economic climate, interest earned on the capital would be significantly lower than in recent years. The Area Liaison Officer advised that an update report would be brought to a future meeting, when appropriate.

In referring to the number of written reports being requested by Members of the Committee and members of the public, one Member of the Committee questioned the necessity for all of these reports to be made in writing, particularly in view of the high cost of preparing such documentation.

- (8) Further to the Council having assumed responsibility for enforcing obstruction parking and illegal parking on double yellow lines a member of the public asked how many enforcement officers were employed by the Council, what areas they covered and requested information on how the public could report offences, as the Police appeared to be no longer interested in attending such incidents. In response, the Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety advised that seven civil enforcement officers were employed to cover the Stourbridge and Halesowen areas, working shifts between 8 am and 6 pm on different routes around the two town centres and other important routes. Anyone wishing to report incidents should ring 01384 812345 and the matter would be referred to an appropriate officer for attention.

Councillor Adams, as Cabinet Member for Transportation commented that the Council had only recently taken over the responsibility for civil parking. Any teething issues would be resolved and Officers would investigate all complaints.

- (9) A voluntary group, who introduced themselves as being interested in becoming involved in local environmental projects and community group networking were advised to contact the Sustainability Officer within the Directorate of the Urban Environment for advice and assistance. The Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health undertook to speak with the group's representatives outside of the meeting.

One Member of the Committee expressed an interest in becoming involved if appropriate and encouraged the group to contact him by e-mail.

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CO-OPTED MEMBER

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the appointment of a co-opted member to represent local tenants and residents, following a nomination from the Stourbridge Area Forum for one of their members to be a co-opted Member of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That Ms Pat Shepherd be appointed as a co-opted member of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year to represent local tenants and residents.

DUDLEY COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICES

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the Small Groups Project and Dudley Council for Voluntary Service (DCVS)

In introducing the report the Area Liaison Officer advised that the project was a lottery-funded initiative, which aimed to provide tailored support to small and emerging local and voluntary groups. "Small Groups" were currently defined as organisations having an income of up to £15,000 per annum and were entitled to receive free support from the Small Groups Development Officer in respect of the issues indicated in paragraph 7 of the report now submitted. In addition, the project offered small groups room hire and photocopying facilities at a reduced rate.

He encouraged any small groups to take advantage of the services provided by the DCVS. Councillor Mrs Walker, as Cabinet Member for Children's Services, commented that small groups and networks made a significant contribution to the community and she was grateful for the work of the DCVS.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report on the Small Groups Project and Dudley Council for Voluntary Service be noted.

CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

The Area Liaison Officer reported orally that, since the last meeting of the Committee, a capital allocation had been received from Dudley Business Crime Partnership for £2,849 towards the cost of a booster aerial to link up the Lye area with the CCTV systems. This application had been discussed with the Chairman and approved under the powers delegated to the Area Liaison Officer by the Committee. Members of the Committee confirmed that they were in agreement with the decision to grant the funding to the Dudley Business Crime Partnership.

A suggestion was made, in support of Option B for the repairs of the gates at Mary Stevens Park, and to ensure that the project could be completed within five years, the Committee agree that at the start of the next five municipal years, the sum of £10,000 from the Committee's Capital Allocation Budget, be set aside annually towards the Option for the repairs of the gates at Mary Stevens Park, should the Heritage Lottery Funding bid be unsuccessful. If lottery funding was received, then the funding set aside to repair the gates could be returned to the Committee's Capital Allocation budget, for use on community projects.

While it was agreed that the situation would be reviewed annually, one Member of the Committee expressed concern at the impact on small voluntary groups.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Sum of £2,849 towards the cost of a booster aerial to link up the Lye area with the CCTV systems be awarded to the Dudley Crime Partnership.
- (2) That £10,000 of capital allocation funding be set aside annually at the beginning of the next five municipal years towards the cost of the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens Parks, should the Heritage Lottery Fund bid be unsuccessful.
- (3) That the resolution set out in (2) above be reviewed annually.

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ERNEST STEVENS TRUST – APPLICATION

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on two applications for funding from the Ernest Stevens Trust.

A suggestion was made that to support Option B for the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens Park, and to ensure that the project was completed within five years, the Committee agree, that for the next five municipal years, the interest earned on the capital of the Trust's fund be set aside towards Option B, should the Heritage Lottery Funding bid be unsuccessful. However, if, in the meantime, an application was received, which the Committee or Area Liaison Officer considered to be of exceptional need, then a grant could be considered and made and, as a consequence, a smaller sum allocated towards the cost of the repairs to the gates.

It was also suggested that section 106 funding from future developments in the area be reserved for the repair of the gates.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the application by Wollaston St Andrews Scout Group for £4000 towards the cost of modifying the kitchen and toilet and the creation of raised garden beds be approved.
- (2) That the application by Lye Town Football Club for £5,000 towards the cost of a combined rebuild project in partnership with Lye Cricket Club be approved.
- (3) That for the next five years interest earned on the capital of the Ernest Stevens Trust fund be set aside for the repair of the gates at Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge.

- (4) That subject to the resolution set out in (3) above, any application for funding from the Stevens Trust, of exceptional merit, be considered on an individual basis over the next five years.

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PROHIBITION OF WAITING ORDER – GLEBE LANE, SOUTH ROAD, CHERRY STREET AND WITTON STREET, STOURBRIDGE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the proposal to introduce a Prohibition of Waiting Order.

Representatives of a small local convenience store objected to proposals as set out in the report on the grounds that should the prohibition of waiting order be introduced, local shoppers would be unable to park in very close proximity to the store for very short visits, possibly forcing the store to close after servicing the area for over 40 years.

Some residents commented that the convenience store was a lifeline, especially for older residents who had no other means of shopping.

In response to a suggestion that the local public house might be willing to allow shoppers to park, a member of the public advised that the landlady of the premises had been approached and she had stated that the car park was for visitors to the public house only.

A number of alternative suggestions were made to the proposals, such as: limited restriction times, rather than twenty four per day restrictions, restrictions to be cut back to 10metres, or possibly 15 metres from the junctions only.

Following consideration of the report and the comments made by Members of the committee and members of the public, an amendment to the proposals in the report to provide for the area for the Prohibition of Waiting Order to be reduced to that of the legally enforceable limit of 15 metres from each of the junctions at Glebe Lane, South Road, Cherry Street and Witton Street, Stourbridge was agreed.

RESOLVED

That the making of the Glebe Lane, Stourbridge and associated streets Prohibition of Waiting Order be supported and introduced, subject to an area covered by the Prohibition of Waiting Order be reduced to the legally enforceable limit of 15 metres from each of the junctions at Glebe Lane, South Road, Cherry Street and Witton Street, Stourbridge.

YOUTH SERVICE CONSULTATION

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted advising the Committee of the publication of the Youth Service consultation document which had been published on 7th October 2008 and would run until 6th January, 2009.

The following comments made by a member of the public under the Public Forum Issues:

- (a) given that its limited funding, especially in a future threatened by recession, the Council's energies could be better utilised in persuading engineering, construction and manufacturing companies to locate or re-locate into this area to provide foreseeable stability for school leavers with opportunities for apprenticeships and regular employment.
- (b) Why the documents referred to the age range 13-19.
- (c) Why the option of accepting customs etc which could conflict with British laws and customs should be introduced.
- (d) With the pending departure of the Director of Children's Services consideration should be given to more immediate problems than the Youth Service.
- (e) Full employment would remove a considerable number of supposed youth problems.

A discussion ensued, in the course of which comments made by members included the following issues.

- (1) That the Targeted Youth support Groups were considered important. Universal Work was also considered important.
- (2) It should be noted that it was only a small number of young people who were responsible for anti social behaviour related problems in communities. Most young people were positive and behaved responsibly.
- (3) It could prove difficult to help young people not in education or employment.
- (4) There was a need to ensure that young people received appropriate training to teach them the skills required to gain employment in modern technology areas.
- (5) Opportunities should be taken to ensure that young vulnerable young people did not fall on the wrong side of the law.

- (6) There was a need to open centres for young people, not close them.
- (7) There was a need to include disadvantaged young people who were not academic, but who could gain useful skills.
- (8) The suggestions within the report were welcomed.

As Interim Chief Executive, Mr Polychronakis advised of the Council's intention to invest funding in young people in the hope that in the future local young people would have the skills to gain employment in local jobs. He encouraged those present to let the Council know their views on proposals for major changes to town centres, including Stourbridge, some of which had already been started.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the content of the oral presentation on the restructuring of Youth Services in Dudley be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Children's Services be advised of the comments on the Restructure of Youth Services, as set out above.

CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF THE ETHNIC MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT SERVICE (EMAS)

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the issue of consultation on the future of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) which had been published initially on 8th September, 2008 and amended on 23rd October, 2008, further to the High Court judgment on the judicial review of the Council decision on the budget for the Service.

The effect of the referral to the High Court was that it was no longer feasible for the reduction in the EMAS budget to be implemented in the current financial year and consultation therefore was now being undertaken on the issue of the financial support for EMAS for 2009/10. The consultation document had therefore been amended accordingly.

In presenting the proposals, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Without Portfolio) explained the content of the consultation document, which comprised two key elements: the financial support and the configuration of the service. The Assistant Director also referred to an Equality Impact Assessment, which had been carried out to support the consultation.

Councillor Mrs Walker, as Cabinet Member for Children's Services commented on changes to the way in which the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) was funded, with monies being paid directly to schools to use as was seen appropriate.

One Member of the Committee welcomed the consultation and considered it long over due, but hoped that it would not be seen as a way to cut investment for volunteer groups.

Members of the Committee and members of the public were encouraged to advise the Director of Children's Services of any comments they might have on the consultation document.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the contents of the report submitted be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Children's Services be advised of the comments made above.

51 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on written responses sent in respect of questions asked at previous meetings.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

52 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillors Mrs Martin and Mrs Walker raised extreme concerns regarding a recent planning application to convert the Amblecote War Memorial Club into a Club and Cabaret Restaurant. They expressed concerns regarding the close proximity to the homes of local residents of such a cabaret restaurant and resultant parking issues which could arise. They also expressed concern as to the nature of the cabarets. Previously, the owners of the Club had failed to respond to correspondence from the Council regarding the need for repairs to the club and bowling green. Comments were also made regarding the possible use of the bowling green as a car park, should planning permission be granted.

53 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 information given in respect of the dates of future meetings of Select Committees, be noted.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

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

19th January, 2009 at 7.00 pm – Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge

9th March, 2009 at 7.00 pm – Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge

The meeting ended at 9.10 p.m.

CHAIRMAN