

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Thursday 14th January, 2010 at 6.30 p.m.
Hurst Green Primary School, Narrow Lane, Halesowen

PRESENT

Councillor James (Chairman)
Councillor Burston (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Body, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Faulkner, Hill, Taylor and Vickers.

Officers

Area Liaison Officer (Interim Director of Finance), Head of Executive Support, Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery, Head of Museums, Green Spaces and Bereavement Services, Group Engineer (Transportation) and Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist (all Directorate of the Urban Environment), Area Community Renewal Officer (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Assistant Director of Children's Services (Performance and Partnership), The Area Youth Team Leader for Halesowen (both Directorate of Children's Services), Interim Assistant Director of Law, Property and Human Resources (Legal and Democratic Services) and Mr Sanders (both Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

Also in Attendance

Mr P Towers – West Midlands Fire Service
Mr Tibbetts – vexillographer of a flag for Halesowen

There were approximately 15 members of the public in attendance.

60

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Nicholls, Mrs Shakespeare, K Turner, Mrs Turner and J Woodall and Inspector Malpass.

61

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of a Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct were made by the following in respect of the matters indicated:-

Councillor Hill in respect of Agenda item number 8 (Flag for Halesowen) in view of his having been in discussion with the vexillographer of one of the flags under consideration at this meeting for approval.

Councillor Hill in respect of Agenda item number 17 (Earls High School Foundation – Final Accounts) in view of his Governorship of Earls High School.

Councillor James in respect of Agenda item number 17 in view of his Governorship of Earls High School.

62 MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11th November, 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed.

63 PETITION

Councillor Taylor indicated that he would be submitting to the Area Liaison Officer a petition from local residents requesting the provision of a pedestrian crossing at Carters Lane in the vicinity of the Oak Public House.

64 YOUTH ISSUES

Mr Algiuwair and Ms Gull from the Halesowen Action Crew reported on activities undertaken by this Group, which had included the implementation of a questionnaire on Youth activities and issues or concerns young people might have within their local area. The group also informed the committee of various local events they had implemented, when discussion had taken place on what was hoped would be achieved. The questionnaires would continue to be done within other parts of the area and then assessed. The group were also working with Dudley Youth Council where they had two young people sitting on this body. Ms Gull also informed the committee that as of 1st April 2010 the group would be looking at taking over the Youth Opportunities Fund for the local area in order to assess the Youth Opportunities Fund Bids.

65 EMERGENCY SERVICES ISSUES

Mr P Towers, West Midlands Fire Service, reported orally on the incidents attended by the Fire Service over the three month period from 1st November, 2009 to 1st January, 2010, of which there had been 91 in number. Mr Towers then stated the number of incidents dealt with under the respective headings of Voids and Derelict Buildings, Fly Tipping and Abandoned Vehicles.

66 AREA POLICE AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER (PACT) ISSUES

The Police were not represented at the meeting and no issues were raised by Members of the Committee or the public.

The dates, times and locations of PACT meetings had been included on the Agenda for information.

67

A FLAG FOR HALESOWEN

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted indicating the manner in which the Halesowen Flag Competition had been progressed and which summarised the work undertaken by the Halesowen Town Centre Development Working Group in the initial shortlisting of the designs submitted. Copies of the two alternative entries recommended by the Working Group for consideration for approval were circulated. The vexillographer of one of the designs, Mr Tibbetts, was in attendance at the meeting.

The Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery reported that 14 entries had been submitted to the Working Group, all of which were of a high standard, and that the Working Group had recommended referral of the two designs which, in their opinion, offered the greatest clarity, relevance to Halesowen and appropriateness of design. The Chairman of the Halesowen History Society, John Billingham, had advised the Working Group on the historic and heraldic aspects of the respective entries and, on behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Mr Billingham for his considerable assistance in the matter.

A secret ballot of Members of the Committee in which Members were asked to vote on their preference and mark them in the respective areas of quality of flag design and relevance of flag design to Halesowen, was organised. Consideration of the matter was then adjourned until later in the meeting to enable ballot forms to be returned to the Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery for the scores to be counted.

It was indicated in the report that the winner would receive a framed certificate and would have the honour of raising the flag at a special ceremony, to which all entrants would be invited. The report also noted that all participants had received a letter of thanks and a Certificate of Participation.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and that a decision on the flag to be recommended to the Council for approval be deferred until later in the meeting, after the totalling of the marks awarded in the ballot.

68

PUBLIC FORUM

(a) Halesowen Library

Further to Minute 49(c) of the previous meeting of the Committee, questions from three members of the public were received in respect of the changes made to Halesowen Library in which part of the premises had been utilised for Social Services purposes.

In response to the first questioner, who had asked to be advised of the timetable of progress expected by the Committee regarding the Library, the Chairman indicated that a full report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee. In expanding on the question, the questioner referred to a meeting he had had with Sylvia Heal, M.P., further to which a letter of three pages length had been sent by the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services to that Member of Parliament. The questioner expressed some surprise that the issue of the Library had not been included on the agenda for this meeting.

The second questioner asked to be advised as to when the Social Services provision in the Library premises would cease and whether the coffee lounge would be reinstated. The questioner expressed the view that, before the changes, the premises had provided an effective library facility for residents of Halesowen but that the reduction in space for library purposes had resulted in a diminution of service to library users. The questioner also regretted that, under the current layout, the use of the premises for local interest groups, such as the Halesowen History Association and the Gardeners' Club could no longer be accommodated. He also suggested that, by using stub walling, the former kitchen area could have been utilised.

The third questioner asked for the reason why the Social Care facility now included in the old library premises could not have been accommodated instead in their previous premises, after its refurbishment.

In response to the questions, a Member of the Committee drew attention to further changes to the library premises which had resulted in additional space for reference purposes having been allocated. The same Member also referred to the improved communication system that had been provided.

RESOLVED

That the comments now made be noted and that a report to the next meeting on the Library be made.

(b) Coombswood Green Wedge

In expressing the view that a precedent had been set by the Council's Development Control Committee when, in 2000, it had refused the developers, Barratts, planning consent for residential development at Coombswood because of the Landscape Heritage Area status of the site, the member of the public who raised the issue contended that the recent planning application for Coombswood should have been refused for the same reason. In response, the Chairman of the Committee stated that all planning applications had to be judged on their merits, and in line with planning guidance; and that the situation that had applied to one application would not necessarily relate to another. It was agreed that a written response would be sent to the questioner.

69 WARD ISSUES

No issues were raised under this item.

70 QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 11TH NOVEMBER, 2009

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted in response to questions raised at the meeting of the Committee held on 11th November, 2009.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

71 REPORT OF HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE WORKING GROUPS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on issues raised at meetings of the Working Groups of the Committee.

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services on the activities of the Community Renewal Working Group, at its meeting held on 16th November, 2009, was appended to the Report.

It was noted that the activities of the Halesowen Town Centre Development Working Group would be the subject of another item on the agenda for this meeting. It was noted further that no meetings of the Cradley/Windmill Hill Regeneration Plan Delivery Working Group had been held since the previous meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the content of the information contained in the report now submitted and the appendix to the report be noted.

72 REPORT ON ST. GEORGE'S DAY CELEBRATIONS ON 24TH APRIL 2010

A report of the Chief Executive, updating the Committee on the activities to be provided for in this event, was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

73 HALESOWEN ABBEY – PROPOSED CONVERSION OF BARNS TO FORM 6 DWELLINGS AND PROVIDE A VISITOR CENTRE (PLANNING REFERENCE: P09/1219 AND P09/1218)

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted inviting comments on proposals for the conversion of Halesowen Abbey to form six dwellings and to provide a Visitor Centre, together with ancillary work.

The report summarised the history of the Abbey and buildings, indicated the current position regarding its Listed Building status and summarised the nature of the facilities that would be provided for under the conversion scheme, including reference to the amenity space and car parking proposals. Reference was also made to undertakings given by the site owner regarding access to the public by way of permissive footpaths across the Abbey site, which would link to the public footpath network that currently ran to the east of the Abbey. The report noted that comments were awaited from a number of internal and external consultees, including statutory consultees and English Heritage.

A presentation expanding on the report was given by the Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist, who summarised the history of the Abbey and its surrounds through the centuries, indicated how the premises had been utilised since the foundation of the Abbey in 1215, and reported on its status as a Listed Grade 1 Building and a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

In referring to planning applications made in relation to the premises, the Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist indicated that an application made in 2002 for the repair of the farm buildings, and conversion to offices and dwellings had been withdrawn eventually, owing to concerns that the ground work necessary to supply the barn conversions could damage archaeological remains. There had also been concerns that if the freehold of individual units was to be sold, it would not be possible to manage the whole site effectively as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist confirmed, however, that the scheme under consideration currently had addressed the concerns which had led to the withdrawal of the 2002 application.

Under the current proposals, archaeological excavations had revealed that the ground works and provision of underground services could be provided at a depth which would not affect archaeological deposits. The Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist also confirmed that the conversion work now proposed was acceptable in that it would enable the management of the site as a Scheduled Ancient Monument to be facilitated.

In giving details of the design proposals, the Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist indicated that the proposals had been designed to mitigate impact on the historic fabric and that, viewed externally, there would be very little visible change to the buildings. An amenity space for the dwellings would be provided for within the courtyards as they existed currently. The existing farm track would be upgraded with passing places installed and the junction with Manor Way improved. A small Visitor Car Park on the site of the former Dutch barn would be surfaced with "grasscrete" or similar material. Under the proposals, the owner would retain the freehold of the converted units and had agreed to enter into a Section 106 Agreement for the provision of associated works including marking out the outline of the Abbey Church and interpretation panels..

In the discussion on the report and the presentation, the following points were made:-

- That it was important that items of archaeological interest undiscovered hitherto were not lost through the construction works.
- That any trench digging or other excavation necessary, particularly when the foundations were laid, should be carried out sensitively and by hand, if necessary, and not by machinery. In response to this, the Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist confirmed that the work would be observed and any remains revealed recorded and the monitoring of the operation would be made a condition of the planning consent.

- The opening of the Abbey to the public more regularly in the summer months was advocated. In confirming that provision could be included in the Section 106 Agreement, the Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist confirmed that discussions were progressing with the owner regarding an minimum number of days opening but the point was made that English Heritage would also have considerable influence on this issue.
- Regarding access from the main road, a member of the public suggested that the opportunity might be taken to negotiate an improved visibility strip for ingress and egress to the Cycling and Athletic Club as part of the Section 106 Agreement. The Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist agreed to arrange for this matter to be considered.
- In response to a comment made by a member of the public, in which he expressed concerns as to the structural changes proposed, the point was made that no change was envisaged to the outside of the barns.

RESOLVED

That the report and presentation be noted and that the Principal Conservation Officer/Borough Archaeologist take up the issues arising from the points made.

THE BOROUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted summarising the work of the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum and which also sought to encourage members of the public to join the Forum as members.

The report set out the statutory requirement under Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000 for the Council to establish a local access forum for the area and for its composition to comprise between 10 and 22 members, to be appointed for a period of not less than one year and not more than three years. The legislation required a reasonable balance of Forum members from the categories of access users, land owners and other relevant interested parties. The Council, as appointing authority, was entitled to appoint members to the Forum. The Council had a statutory duty to consult Forums on a number of issues and to notify or provide Forums with information in certain circumstances and the issues concerned were indicated in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the report now submitted. While the Forum was not a statutory consultee to the local planning authority, it had the power to advise local planning authorities on the recreation and access implications of individual planning applications.

In expanding on the report, the Head of Museums, Greenspace and Bereavement in the Directorate of the Urban Environment encouraged the members of the public in attendance to apply to join the Forum, should they have an interest in open space issues and activities.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted and that members of the public be invited to apply for membership of the Local Access Forum by the closing date of 14th February, 2010.

75

HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on progress with regard to developments taking place in and around Halesowen Town Centre, including an update on the work of the Halesowen Town Centre Development Working Group.

In relation to regeneration issues, reference was made in the report to the Action Plan on environmental improvements in Halesowen, which was being overseen by the Halesowen Town Centre Development Working Group. These issues included the “Halesowen in Bloom” initiative. The actions proposed were divided into short, medium and long term projects. The first initiative the Working Group proposed would be implemented was that of the Husky Dog Island scheme, which would include signage, new planting and other improvements, and provide a more attractive gateway to Halesowen and was due to be implemented by March, 2010 and the details of the scheme were explained by the Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery. The Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery indicated further that the last capital project from the Town Centre funding in 2009/10 would be that of the replacement of the Fingerpost sign in Fingerpost Gardens.

The report indicated that the partnership approach to the ‘Halesowen in Bloom’ initiative was continuing with the Council’s partners and that efforts were being made by the Working Group to attract new potential partners. In expanding on the report, the Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery stated that the Council would shortly be seeking sponsorship for the Halesowen in Bloom initiative from local businesses and employers and that 14 sources of grant funding had been identified to date, in respect of which applications for items for the implementation of environmental initiatives in the town were being prepared.

In relation to transportation issues, reference was made in the report and in the presentation to the Grange Island Safety Scheme, which had reached completion within the timetable programmed. Regarding the provision of the public art element to the scheme, this would be in two phases and consultation, which had closed on 4th January, 2010, had been undertaken in relation to the respective matters of the design of the surface finish to the island and the provision of a sculpture. The results of the consultation were reported in the presentation. It was also indicated in the presentation that consultation on the proposed pedestrian crossings and infilling of the subways at the Earls Island had been completed and the results of the consultation exercise on these matters were also reported.

Reference to various events undertaken successfully at Christmas, including the Christmas lights switch on, Sandvic Tree Christmas lights and the Churches Together Carol Service, were referred to in the report.

In the discussion, reference was made to the public transport arrangements for Halesowen in which attention was drawn by certain members to the difficulty in accessing Halesowen town centre by bus from certain areas within the boundaries of the town. Residents from those areas reliant on public transport therefore had difficulty in reaching the town centre to shop. On the issue of Halesowen in Bloom, a suggestion was made by a member of the public that, should sponsorship from business be not forthcoming in sufficient amounts, it might be expedient to seek sponsorship from individual members of the public.

RESOLVED

1. That the report now submitted, together with the presentation by the Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery, be noted.
2. That the results of the consultation on the Grange Island and the Earls Island Schemes and the clear majority of support for the proposals for each respective scheme by the respondents, be noted.
3. That the Director of the Urban Environment raise with Centro the issue of bus services serving Halesowen Town Centre from the residential areas of the town and that the Director be also asked to explore the possibility of Asda and other leading retailers in the town running buses to and from their stores from the residential estates.

4. That the Halesowen Town Centre Development Working Group consider further the issue of sponsorship for the Halesowen in Bloom initiative and, in this connection, the Group be asked to consider the feasibility of seeking sponsorship from individual members of the public if necessary.
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76

EARLS HIGH SCHOOL FOUNDATION – FINAL ACCOUNTS

A report of the Interim Director of Finance was submitted seeking approval of the final accounts of the Earls High School Foundation for the year to 31st March, 2009.

RESOLVED

1. That, on behalf of the Council, in their capacity as Trustees, the accounts of the Trust for the year ended 31st March, 2009 be approved by the Committee.
 2. That the Chairman be authorised to sign the accounts on behalf of the Committee.
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77

DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted seeking consideration of applications for grants from the capital budget allocation of the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. That, subject to the cost of paint in the sum of £200 being met by the organisation, a grant of £2,102 be made to Cradley Then and Now for refurbishing of an air raid shelter, located on the Colley Lane School Site, for events and activities linking local schools and the community together, the work to be undertaken to include re-roofing of the shelter, the creation of a suitable accessible entrance and the replacement of an existing door, as well as indoor maintenance works for which help or volunteers will be forthcoming.
2. That, subject to the receipt of estimates and quotations to the satisfaction of the Area Liaison Officer, a grant of up to £5,000 be made to the First Coombswood Scout and Guide Group towards the installation of gas central heating as part of refurbishment work being undertaken by the Group to improve access and usability at the headquarters of the Group based at Gorsty Hill Road.

3. That, subject to assurances regarding appropriate insurance cover for items stored at the Scout Centre and at individual homes, to the satisfaction of the Area Liaison Officer, a grant of up to £5,000 be made to the Women's Awareness Association for various items of information technology equipment and sewing/overlocker machines.
4. That since the Group has only recently received a capital grant from the Committee, the application for a grant of up to £5,000 for the renovation of the kitchen area at their Group headquarters by the Howley Grange Scout Group be not approved but that a grant of up to £2,500 for this purpose be made.

78

RESULT OF BALLOT ON 'A FLAG FOR HALESOWEN':

The Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery in the Directorate of the Urban Environment reported the success of flag number 2 as having received the greater number of the votes in the secret ballot for the Flag for Halesowen competition.

RESOLVED

That the Council be recommended that Flag number 2, as circulated, be approved as the flag for Halesowen.

79

DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the final ordinary meeting of the Committee in the current municipal year would be held at Lutley Community Centre on 10th March, 2010.

80

SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

The dates of future meetings of Select Committees in the current municipal year were noted.

The meeting ended at 7.55 pm.

CHAIRMAN