

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Thursday, 24th January, 2008, at 6.30 p.m.
at Colley Lane Primary School, Colley Lane, Halesowen

PRESENT

Councillor Jackson (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Faulkner (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Body, Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Hill, James, Ms Partridge, Mrs Shakespeare, Taylor, Mrs Turner and Woodall.

Officers

Area Liaison Officer, Assistant Director for Partnership and Children's Trust, Head of Policy (Executive and Support), Group Engineer (Transportation), Principal Solicitor (Mr M Farooq), Priority Neighbourhood Manager (Halesowen), Mrs M Johal and Mr P Furidze (Directorate of Law and Property)

Also in Attendance

Inspector Hobson – West Midlands Police
Chief Superintendent Munro – West Midlands Police

Approximately 110 members of the public were in attendance.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Ms Nicholls and K Turner and the Assistant Director of Housing (Strategy and Private Sector).

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

- (a) Councillor Body – Agenda item No 10 – Disposal of High School and Cradley Leisure Centre Site – A Personal interest in view of him being the Chair of Homer Hill Friends of the Park.
- (b) Councillor Burston – Agenda item No 17 – Halesowen Town Centre Development – Personal interest in view of him being employed by CENTRO.

- (c) Councillors Burston, Hill and James – Agenda item No 13 – The Earls High School Foundation Final Accounts– A personal interest in view of their being Governors of Earls High School.
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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14th November, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed subject to an amendment to Minute No 51(c) to include the words “such as Shell Corner Partnership” after the words “community facilities” in the preamble to, and resolution of that minute.

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YOUTH ISSUES

It was noted that youth representatives would not be in attendance at the meeting as there was an event happening in Halesowen that night relating to the opening of a Smoothie Bar.

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POLICE ISSUES

Inspector Hobson reported on action that had been taken regarding the complaints made about scramblers and motorbikes at the previous meeting. He reported that four motorbikes had been seized and fourteen people had received first warnings and that if they reoffended their motorbikes would also be seized. He also circulated leaflets advertising future Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings that were due to be held in the area.

Inspector Hobson introduced Chief Superintendent Peter Munro who stated that he would be stationed in Halesowen for the next few years and that he looked forward to working with Members of the Committee and public resident in the area.

In response to a query regarding the areas that had been targeted regarding the seizure of motorbikes, Inspector Hobson reported that the operation had commenced with Wollescote. However, the operation had spread to other areas including Lye and Cradley.

A Member expressed concern at the stipulation to submit questions to the police a week in advance and commented that Members and the public should be given the opportunity to raise questions when they arose. Another Member concurred with the comments made and also referred to the stipulation of Members submitting questions in writing three days in advance of the meeting under Ward Issues and asked that this should also be reviewed. In responding the Chairman explained that the stipulations had been included to enable a detailed response to

questions being provided but that it did not prevent anyone from raising urgent matters. The Vice-Chairman further commented that if questions were submitted beforehand detailed responses could be given on the day instead of being deferred and reported at the next meeting. However, she suggested that the words “where possible” could be included.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the verbal report given by Inspector Hobson regarding police issues be noted.

- (2) That the following dates of the Partners and Communities Together meetings be noted:-

Neighbourhood 28 – Cradley – 23rd April, 2008 at 7pm – Colley Lane Primary School

Neighbourhood 29 – Hasbury and Lapal – To be Arranged in May at Lutley Primary School

Neighbourhood 30 – Hawne and Halesowen Town – 6th March, 2008 at 7pm – Windsor High School, Richmond Street

Neighbourhood 31 – Coombeswood and Hurst Green – 3rd April, 2008 at 7pm – Halesbury School, Feldon Lane

Neighbourhood 32 – Halesowen and Lapal – 11th March 2008 at 7pm – Leasowes Community College, Kent Road

- (3) That the Area Liaison Officer be requested to consider reviewing the stipulations to submit questions in writing to the Police and in respect of Ward Issues in advance of the meeting.

- (a) The following questions were asked and comments made about the proposed reductions for the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) budget: -
 - There were seventy-five service areas within the Directorate of Children’s Services and why had only EMAS been targeted twice in the same financial year. Why could small amounts not be taken from budgets for each service area?
 - When does a proposal become a decision and at what stage in the process could a Select Committee call a decision in.
 - There was a large Yemeni community and education was the only way out of poverty for them.

- Why had the Council not consulted with members of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community about the proposed cuts?
- Cuts had been made on a yearly basis yet improvements were not visible and strong representations needed to be made to increase budgets otherwise services could be lost.
- The Yemeni children were already suffering and now EMAS was being reduced which meant further provision being taken away from them.
- The Al Markuz Al Taleome Supplementary School worked with Yemeni children and since its closure children were left wandering the streets. Why had this service been cut? There were 2000 Yemeni's in Dudley and they only had a small community centre and support was needed for a bigger centre.

Arising from the concerns expressed a Member proposed that, owing to the unprecedented level of representations made a letter be written to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Children's Services expressing the concerns made with a view to reviewing the consequences and implications of the reduction in the EMAS budget.

The Area Liaison Officer acknowledged the concerns expressed and representations made. However, he explained about the budgetary pressures placed upon the Council and that savings had to be made to pay for the increased financial costs to accommodate children in care, provide support to the elderly and adults with learning difficulties. He then explained that the total spend on EMAS was funded by two sources and the major source was direct from the Government. In 2004/05 the Government were providing about £1.7m for this service with a Council contribution of about £0.9m. In 2008/09 the Government's contribution will have been reduced by about £0.3m compared to 2004/05 and the Council's contribution will be reduced by about £0.3m.

A Member commented that Select Committees had been given the opportunity to consider the budget proposals and he indicated that the reports should also be submitted to Area Committees.

RESOLVED

That the Area Liaison Officer be requested, on behalf of the Committee, to submit the concerns and representations as detailed above to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

- (b) It was queried whether the Cradley area would be considered for a new secondary school in the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

In responding the Area Liaison Officer indicated that he was not aware of any proposals for a new secondary school in the Cradley area.

A Member clarified that the consultation exercise would be finalised next year and that opportunities were available for people to express their views and that support should be given. Another Member indicated that currently a meeting was being held at Pensnett School about the BSF programme with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services in attendance and that the same opportunity should be given to residents of Halesowen.

- (c) The start date for the Leasowes restoration was queried. It was also stated that the Leasowes had received a grant of £1.3 million from the Heritage Lottery ten years ago with an additional £500,000 from Dudley Council funding. However, no significant work had been carried out within the park. There were now insufficient funds to cover the cost of strengthening the Virgils Grove dam and to complete the restoration work as originally intended and a detailed breakdown of how the funds had been used to date and how the remaining funds would be allocated was requested.

The meeting was informed that the Director for the Urban Environment would be requested to give an update report on the matter to the next Area Committee meeting.

- (d) A question was asked about progress on the Cradley Regeneration Plan and Foredraft Street.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) stated that the Plan had been approved and that consideration was being given to exploring methods of implementation. Regarding Foredraft Street it was reported that although it was part of the same plan a further consultation exercise had to be undertaken and that a development brief was being prepared in this regard. A bat survey was required for Foredraft Street and this had been commissioned.

- (a) Councillor Ms Partridge
 - (i) Welcomed the news that the application for the Cradley Speedway had been withdrawn and thanked everyone involved for their support in the matter.

- (ii) Referred again to the BSF programme and owing to the importance to the Cradley area requested that Halesowen be given the opportunity to be fully engaged at the earliest opportunity.
 - (iii) Mentioned bollards installed in Careless Green outside Wollescote School that posed a danger to residents.
- (b) Councillor Body
- (i) Referred to a previous request that had been made over a year ago. Approval had been given for extra lighting on the Tanhouse Estate to allow children to play in the area. However, no action had as yet been taken.
 - (ii) Mentioned a leaflet that had been distributed about a long-term strategy for regeneration entitled "The Arc of Opportunity". It was commented that there was no opportunity for children if schools and leisure facilities were being closed.
- (c) Mrs Faulkner
- Informed the meeting that a public consultation exercise had taken place last week regarding the Shell Corner Regeneration Plan and that a draft plan would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

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ERITREAN TIGRE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

As the representative for the Eritrean Tigre Welfare Association was not in attendance it was agreed that the item should be deferred to a future meeting.

RESOLVED

That the presentation on the Eritrean Tigre Welfare Association be deferred to a future meeting of the Committee.

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DISPOSAL OF HIGH SCHOOL AND CRADLEY LEISURE CENTRE SITE

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on information requested at the last Committee to enable a recommendation to be made to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services about the future of Cradley Leisure Centre.

In presenting the report the Area Liaison Officer outlined the history of the site culminating in the decision to close Cradley High School in July 2008 and highlighted that, according to figures at hand, it was not economically viable to maintain Cradley Leisure Centre as a stand-alone facility hence the proposal that the site be declared surplus to the Directorate of Children's Services requirements. The meeting was informed that the Council were minded to put in place a provision for changing facilities for use by people who used the playing pitches and associated services in the event that the Leisure Centre was declared surplus and disposed of.

A lengthy and spirited debate ensued with some Members of the Committee and the public expressing concern over the proposed disposal of the site and in particular that it appeared the decision to declare the site surplus had already been taken and therefore there had been no local consultation with the local ward representatives, the public and in particular, service users of the various sports facilities at the Leisure Centre. A member referred to a previous resolution (Minute No 51(b) of the Committee meeting held on 14th November 2007) and stated that the report before the meeting did not fully satisfy the resolution referred to as none of the resolution's requirements had been complied with. She expressed the view that the site had been appraised and asked how much the Council had been offered by a developer to dispose of the site to that developer.

Some members of the public, especially those who were members of the Badminton Club based at the Leisure Centre, claimed that the usage figures in the report submitted appeared to be inaccurate, as they had not come from the service users but from Cradley High School. In addition, another member of the public expressed concern that the lettering on the Leisure Centre building had been removed indicating that a deal had already been struck and the Committee were only being consulted as a formality. A member of the public from the Homer Hill Friends of the Park expressed concern that, given the apparent lack of consultation over the proposed disposal of the Cradley School site and the Leisure Centre, Homer Hill Park would become smaller in view of reported plans to widen the road to the Cradley High School site by taking land from the park. A Member expressed the view that a full and proper consultation was required over the matter and at the same time expressed his support for the provision of changing facilities in the event of the Leisure Centre being disposed of.

The meeting heard that the matter before the Committee was whether or not, following consideration of the report submitted, a recommendation was to be made by the Area Committee to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services to dispose of the land on terms and conditions to be negotiated by the Director of Law and Property. Another Member informed the meeting that the move to dispose of the Leisure Centre went against statements made in the Council Chamber by some Councillors to keep the Cradley Leisure Centre Facilities open and improve them.

The Area Liaison Officer informed the meeting that no decision had yet been made regarding whether or not the site should be declared surplus, no developers had been offered the land and the value of the site could not be disclosed in public to protect the Council's financial interest. The Area Liaison Officer explained that the process of declaring land controlled by the Council surplus involved consultation and in particular consulting the relevant Area Committee within whose area the land was located. That Area Committee would, if satisfied that the land should be declared surplus, recommend to a relevant Cabinet Member that the land be declared surplus and disposed of on terms and conditions to be negotiated by the Director of Law and Property. The meeting were also informed that the current report was following the process outlined and a decision to declare the Cradley High site had not yet been made.

The meeting were also informed that the Leisure Centre was an integral part of the school site and that it would be uneconomical to maintain the leisure facilities as a stand-alone service in the event of a decision to dispose of the school site. The Area Liaison Officer referred the meeting to the financial figures contained in the report submitted to the meeting.

Upon being put to the vote it was agreed that the resolution of 14th November 2007, be implemented. It was therefore,

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be informed of the concerns of the Committee that: -

- (1) No detailed discussion had taken place between Directorates about the Cradley High School and Cradley leisure centre site.
- (2) No consultation had taken place with Members, stakeholders and the general public and that the Committee considers that it is in the Council's and the public's interest that such detailed consultation should take place.
- (3) The decision to declare the site of Cradley High School surplus to requirements for sale should be put in abeyance pending further information.
- (4) Following further consultation the matter be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee with a full report and recommendations for further consideration.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be recommended to approve the granting of a vehicular and pedestrian access agreement at Homer Hill Road, Homer Hill, Halesowen, as shown hatched on the plan attached to the report, on terms and conditions to be negotiated by the Director of Law and Property.

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DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on requests for funding from the Delegated Capital Budget.

The Area Liaison Officer referred to the grant to the West Midlands Police and reported that similar requests had been submitted to other Area Committees. However, other Area Committees had approved requests subject to match funding and it was suggested, for purposes of consistency that the same should apply in this case.

RESOLVED

- (1) That approval be given to a grant of £1000 to the Cradley Girls Group (Barnardos) for the purchase of a laptop and associated software.
 - (2) That, subject to match funding from the Police, approval be given to a grant of £1410.75 to the West Midlands Police for the purchase of two new bicycles and associated safety equipment/uniforms for two Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).
 - (3) That approval be given to a grant of £1672 to the Halesowen Asian Elderly Association for the purchase of a Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) television, including insurance together with a laptop computer and printer for use at the Centre.
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THE EARLS HIGH SCHOOL FOUNDATION – FINAL ACCOUNTS

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the accounts and annual returns of the Earls High School Foundation Trust.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the accounts of the Trust be approved by this Committee, on behalf of the Council, in their capacity as Trustee.

- (2) That the Chairman of the Committee be authorised to sign the accounts and the annual returns on behalf of the Committee.
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FORMATION OF THE "PUTTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FIRST" CHARITY

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on a consultation document on behalf of the Trustees to rationalise eighteen small 'inactive' education charities into one charity. The new charity, "Putting Children and Young People First" will be of benefit to children and young of Dudley by way of awards for educational achievements.

Arising from the presentation by the Area Liaison Officer, Members considered that Halesowen should retain the Halesowen Area Charity 'Francis Brett Young' but that consideration be given to a variation to the terms and conditions of the Trust to enable awards being granted to achieve their full potential.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Committee, on behalf of the Council, in their capacity as Trustees for Dudley education charities, give approval in principle to the retention of the 'Francis Brett Young' in line with its current designation for educational awards in English to be made to Halesowen secondary school pupils.
- (2) That the Director of Finance be requested to consider varying the terms and conditions of the trust to enable awards being granted to achieve their full potential.
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INFORMATION ABOUT THE APPLICATION AND CALCULATION OF PLANNING OBLIGATIONS SECTION 106 MONIES

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the allocation of Section 106 monies and how it had been spent.

A Member expressed the view that the report did not include the information that had been requested. The request had been to include details on where money had been spent, unspent monies and that the Committee should be given the opportunity to monitor Section 106 monies in the Halesowen area.

A Member also expressed concern that it was not easy to identify how much money had been made available and spent in their wards and it was queried how they could influence its use. In responding the Principal Solicitor informed the meeting that input could be made at meetings of the Development Control Committee but pointed out that any Section 106 money that was allocated had to be directly linked to the actual development itself. The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) further commented that consideration was being given to improving the process to inform Members in the wards benefiting from the proposed expenditure of the Section 106 monies, which had been approved.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendices attached to the report, submitted on information about the application and calculation of Planning Obligations Section 106 monies, be noted.

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FISH 4 DOGS, SALTBROOK INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, CRADLEY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the operation of the pet food manufacturing process called “Fish 4 Dogs” located in Cradley.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on the operation of “Fish 4 Dogs”, be noted

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HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted together with a verbal report on progress made with regard to physical developments taking place within Halesowen Town Centre, particularly the Access Study Consultation. A verbal report was also given with regard to de-trunking of the A456 proposed safety scheme for the Grange Roundabout.

The Group Engineer (Transportation) made the following points in respect of the Access Study findings: -

High Street and Queensway (One-Way) – 87% supported the one-way system but several comments had been made regarding the point of commencing the one-way system.

High Street Parking (45 min stay time) – 81% were in favour of the increased time. It was considered that spaces should be made available for the Church to accommodate weddings and funerals. Placing cones was also suggested but the legality of this system had to be ascertained.

20mph Zone – 73% were in favour. There was some concern about the need for this proposal as it was pointed out that vehicles were already unlikely to exceed 20 mph on the roads in question due to volumes of traffic and some felt that the limit of 20mph was ignored and difficult to enforce.

Town Centre Cycle Facilities – 65% were in favour of reviewing cycle lanes. There were a high number of “no opinions” on this proposal. It was recognised that Halesowen was not the best place to ride a bicycle.

Grange Road and Manor Way Junction – 78% were in favour of reviewing the island. A number of respondents considered that either signals or grade separation would be a more appropriate solution at this location. However, it had not been possible to achieve a workable signal solution within the confines of the existing highway boundary and grade separation would be beyond the financial resources of the Council.

Bus Lanes (Queensway and Bromsgrove Road) – 85% were in favour of getting rid of or reviewing the bus lanes and it was noted that bus operators had not responded.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, on the progress and development in Halesowen Town Centre, be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be informed that the Area Committee had noted the findings of the Access Study consultation and supported the measures included in the Access Study.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be informed that the Committee supports the transfer of the A456 to Council control from the Highways Agency, and the proposed safety scheme at the Grange roundabout as detailed in paragraphs 5 to 8 of the report submitted.

RESOLVED

That it be noted that the next meeting would be held on 12th March, 2008 at Lutley Community Centre.

SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

As a way of giving additional publicity to meetings of the Council's Select Committees, details of Select Committee meetings had been included on the agendas of meetings of Area Committees.

The information given in respect of publicity for future meetings of Select Committees was noted.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm.

CHAIRMAN