

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday 30th March, 2005, at 6.30 p.m.
at Earls High School, Furnace Lane, Halesowen

PRESENT

Councillor Jackson (Chairman)
Councillor Burston (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Body, Boys, Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Mrs Faulkner, Miss Nicholls, Ms Partridge, Mrs Shakespeare, Taylor, Mrs Turner, K Turner and J Woodall

Officers

Head of Policy (Executive and Support), (Acting Area Liaison Officer), Head of Design and Projects, Principal Engineer (Transportation Policy), Senior Engineer, Regeneration Manager and Town Centre Manager (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Senior Solicitor (Gail Breakwell) and Mrs M Johal (Directorate of Law and Property)

Also in Attendance

Mr D Smethurst – Assistant Chief Officer, West Midlands Fire Service
Mr L Rottenbury – Station Commander, West Midlands Fire Service
Mr Murray – Vale Retail
Mr J Buckwell – David Hicken Associates (Planning Consultants)
Ms K Webb – Halogen (Public Relations Consultant)
Mr B Chambers – Vale Retail (Owners/Developers)
Mr Crolla – Asda Stores Ltd (Town Planning Manager)
Mr C Slamon – Chetwood Associates (Architect)
Mr J Fieldsend – Public Relations (Dialogue)
Mr S Kitchen – Stephen Kitchen and Co (Consultant Surveyor)

Approximately 30 members of the public were in attendance

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2nd February, 2005 be approved as a correct record and signed subject to an amendment to resolution to Minute number 74 to include the words “short term and” before “one-hour car parking” and also after “half price ticketing” the insertion of the following wording “and looking at other parking issues such as empty spaces and reduced rates for the over 60’s.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by the following Members for the reasons indicated:

Councillor Burston declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 13 (Bus Showcase Route No 9) and No 14 (Town Centre Development Service) in view of his employment with CENTRO and in respect of Agenda Item No 17 (Earls High School) in view of being a Governor of Earls High School.

Councillors Body, Crumpton and Ms Partridge declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Agenda Item No 11 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of being Members and Trustees of Beech Tree Miners Institute.

Councillor Mrs Dunn declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 5 (Public Forum) in respect of reference made to Huntingtree School in view of being a Governor of that school.

Councillor Mrs Faulkner declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 11 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of having a relative that attended Beech Tree Miners Institute.

Councillor Mrs Shakespeare declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 17 (Earls High School) in view of being a Governor of Earls High School.

Councillor K Turner declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 11 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of having a son that attended Beech Tree Miners Institute.

Councillor Mrs Turner declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 11 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of having a son that attended Beech Tree Miners Institute.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor James, the Area Liaison Officer and the Assistant Director of Education and Lifelong Learning (Community Education).

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PETITIONS

- (a) A petition requesting an automated pedestrian crossing on the A456 was submitted by Councillor K Turner on behalf of Hayley Causey and Hagley Road Residents Association and referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for attention.

- (b) A petition requesting road safety precautions on the A456 Halesowen was submitted by a resident and referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for attention.
- (c) A petition about the proposed telecommunications mast in Foredraft Street was submitted by Councillor Body on behalf of residents of Rossendale Close and referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for attention.

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CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 13(c), it was

RESOLVED

That Agenda Item No 7 (Youth Issues) be considered before Item No 5 (Public Forum).

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YOUTH ISSUES

A Member from the Youth Council and a newly elected Member of the Youth Parliament gave a detailed presentation on “Have a Say Day”. It was reported that the event had attracted approximately 150 people who took part in various workshops.

The event had highlighted the following issues:-

- There was a need for all schools to have Youth Councils to enable students to convey their views.
- Students should be given the opportunity to be involved in discussions in relation to student requirements and teaching issues.
- Personal safety was paramount and there was a need for extra lighting and police on the streets.
- Overgrown hedges and bushes needed to be cut and streets needed to be cleaner.
- To discourage dog fouling, people should be educated to use bins provided.
- Efforts should be made to introduce more social activities for youngsters and they should be made cheaper.
- More days such as “Have a Say Day” should be regularly held and communication should be more easily accessible and made available in a variety of ways.

The representative from the Youth Council advised that, following “Have a Say Day”, a report was being compiled by the youth and members that took part, which would be presented to a future meeting.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be received and noted.

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PUBLIC FORUM

- (a) A resident complained about the increasing pigeon population and expressed concern at the diseases that could spread.

In response, the Head of Policy (Executive and Support) reported that discussions had recently taken place in respect of the issue and further confirmed that the matter would be looked at in detail and a report submitted to a future meeting.

- (b) Questions were asked in respect of the Vodafone mast and it was queried whether the proposed siting (outside Huntingtree Primary School) could be placed as an agenda item to the next meeting and also, in light of recent reports and to protect the health of children, it was queried whether the Committee would wholeheartedly oppose the application.

A Member commented that the Committee, as a whole, should formally put in an objection to the Development Control Committee when the application is considered, highlighting the fact that the mast would be inappropriately situated outside a school and a park.

In response, the Head of Policy (Executive and Support) advised that the planning application had yet to be lodged, however it was pointed out that consideration of the application would be dealt with in the normal process. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration stated that it was a recognised factor that there was very little national guidance given in relation to the risks to health arising from telephone masts.

The Chairman reported that all applications were considered on their own merits and further suggested that any objections should be made at the meeting of the Development Control Committee when the application was considered.

- (c) A resident commented in relation to the feasibility study that was due to be undertaken in respect of car parking and it was requested that the study should commence urgently and, whilst undertaking the study, consideration should also be given to the lack of short term parking.

In response, the Head of Policy (Executive and Support) advised that the issue was being treated as a high priority and undertook to consider the comments made.

A member of the public made reference to paragraph 2.4 of the report that referred to the Tesco store on the Samson and Lion site. He indicated that a response had been received from the Head of Policy (Executive and Support), however the concerns had not been addressed. He pointed out that there was a major national problem with obesity and having another food store would further exacerbate the problem. The store would also have an adverse impact on competition and would further increase traffic at an already busy junction. He then made reference to the Planning Inspectorates report that had been produced following the appeal made by Tesco.

In responding, the Chairman advised that Tesco had the right to appeal and the decision of the Planning Inspectorate was final and binding upon the Local Authority. The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) reiterated the point and commented that the Local Authority had no further powers.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report be noted.

WARD ISSUES

(a) Councillor K Turner

- (i) Reported that the pedestrian crossing on Huntingtree Road was still not operational.

In responding, the Senior Engineer reported that commissioning of the crossing had been delayed due to ongoing problems with the electricity supply, however he undertook to investigate the matter and to respond direct to the Member concerned.

- (ii) Thanked Officers for the pedestrian refuge on the Hagley Road and also requested that a letter be written to the Highways Agency, the Police and West Midlands Partnership thanking them for the road safety improvements that had been undertaken on the A456.

- (iii) Referred to the delays that had been encountered following the closure of certain Post Offices and commented that the problem would be exacerbated following the Thornhill Road Post Office closure. He further indicated that it was the intention of the Government to close down pharmacies that dispensed less than 2000 prescriptions and it was pointed out that this applied to 10% of chemists in Halesowen. To encourage people to continue using Thornhill Road Chemist it was suggested that a further letter be written to the Post Office asking them to reconsider the decision to close Thornhill Road Post Office, and if need be, the licence of another Post Office be exchanged.
- (iv) Requested an exemption of payment of licence fee for Lutley Primary School to undertake a one-off car boot sale to raise funds for charitable purposes.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to pursue the matter with the Director of Law and Property.

(b) Councillor Body

- (i) Commented that he had requested Greencare to cut back overgrown bushes in Highfield Road and Foredraft Street due to youths hiding in bushes and taking drugs, however, Greencare had advised that, due to staff shortages, the work could not be carried out until October/November.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to pursue the matter with Green care and to respond direct to the Member.

- (ii) Complained about the lack of bins near Cradley High School and reported that he had been advised that bins could not be provided due to a shortage of staff to empty them.

The Cabinet Member for the Environment undertook to investigate the matter and the Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to monitor the situation.

(c) Councillor Mrs Faulkner

- (i) Expressed concern in relation to heavy goods vehicles and juggernauts that used Cocksheds Lane and Malt Mill Lane to avoid road works that were currently being undertaken on the Blackheath bypass. It was requested that warning signs indicating roads were unsuitable for heavy loads should be erected on the affected streets.

The Senior Engineer reported that discussions were currently underway and he undertook to include signs on Cocksheds Lane and Malt Mill Lane as part of the programme of works for 2005/06.

- (ii) Congratulated Green Hill Youth Council, Barnardos and others in helping children complete and obtain the Dudley Life Partnership Certificate.

(d) Councillor Mrs Shakespeare

Reported that a load of tyres had been dumped at the back of elderly residents bungalows and commended Officers on their swift action in removing them on Easter Sunday.

(e) Councillor Crumpton

- (i) Complained about heavy goods vehicles using Balds Lane, which was a residential area and also had a school. It was requested that a traffic survey be undertaken with a view to stop heavy loads entering the narrow part of the lane.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to pursue the matter in conjunction with the Senior Engineer.

- (ii) Thanked the Youth Service for opening the Youth Council in Colley Gate.

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APPLICATIONS IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

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

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Law and Property be recommended to refuse the application to transfer the land at Laurel Lane to the Magistrates Court, in light of the objections as highlighted in the report.
 - (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be recommended to refuse the application to lease Council owned land at Foredraft Street, Cradley, Halesowen, in light of the objections as highlighted in the report.
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WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

The Assistant Chief Officer, West Midlands Fire Service made reference to the report, as attached to the agenda, and gave a brief presentation in relation to the anticipated changes and cuts within the service.

It was reported that a review had been necessary to ensure that appliances were available according to demand and it was pointed out that the original figure of 62 appliances, had not changed since before the Second World War. Following an analysis, the results had indicated that between midnight and 8 am an average of 3 and 6 appliances were required and during the day (busiest time), an average of 14 vehicles were deployed. The Assistant Chief Officer further reported that fire callouts had dropped due to most houses having smoke alarms fitted and due to education via schools and it had been predicted that statistics would show a further decrease of approximately 11,000 calls by the end of this year.

The Assistant Chief Officer reported that the original proposal had been to reduce appliances to 47, however following consultation the plans had been modified and it had been agreed that fire appliances would be adjusted to 49. However it was confirmed that following a callout, the average response time would remain as before.

In concluding the presentation it was pointed out that there were no changes in relation to the Halesowen Fire Station and it was further confirmed that there were no plans to merge the station. The current Action Plan would remain in force for 3 years and if there were any changes, consultation would be undertaken.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be received and noted.

DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

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

RESOLVED

- (1) That the actions of the Lead Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Councillor Body, in approving a grant of £411 to the Cradley Karate and Ju Jutus Club, for additional floor mats for use at the Cradley Community Centre, be noted.

- (2) That the request from the Beech Tree Miners Welfare Institute, for retrospective funding of £5,000 for the building of dedicated disabled facilities at the Institute, be deferred pending further information and also pending discussions with the Area Liaison Officer regarding the budget implications.
- (3) That up to £5000 be earmarked towards the capital cost of developing the Shell Corner Neighbourhood Shop, subject to the Partnership raising other capital funds and giving reassurances that the capital and ongoing revenue costs can be met, and that a further report be submitted to the Committee before a final decision is made.
- (4) That approval be given to an allocation of up to £4000 for works to be carried out at the Earls High Playing Fields to deter anti-social activities and prevent unauthorised parking on the fields.

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HIGHWAYS MINOR WORKS CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2005/2006

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on proposed programmes of work for Local Safety Schemes, Pedestrian Crossings and Safer Routes to School within the Halesowen area for the 2005/2006 financial year.

RESOLVED

That support be given to the proposed Local Safety Schemes, Pedestrian Crossings and Safer Routes to Schools, as shown on Appendices A, B and C respectively.

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BUS SHOWCASE ROUTE NO 9 – A458 BELLE VALE JUNCTION IMPROVEMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the results of the public consultation undertaken and on the proposed improvement to the junction of Belle Vale and Lutley Mill Road with the A458 Stourbridge Road, Halesowen.

A member of the public queried why bus lay bys had been filled without consultation and further queried whether there were any plans to fill any further lay bys; clarification was also sought on whether planning permission was required for such work, and if so, when it had been granted. In responding, the Principal Engineer (Transportation Policy) advised that planning permission was not required for the work. In relation to the filling in of lay bys he undertook to pursue the matter with Traffic Management for a direct response to the questioner.

A Member expressed concern in relation to the inappropriate positioning of the pelican crossing, which could prove to be dangerous as it was located between two bus shelters. In responding, the Principal Engineer (Transportation Policy) reported that the pelican crossing had been placed in that position because results from the consultation exercise had indicated that people preferred it to be there.

Further comments made by Members included concern that CENTRO had come up with a “make do” scheme and it was suggested that the cost to improve the junction properly should be explored as the safety of people was paramount. In responding, the Cabinet Member for Transportation reported that all parties had been consulted and a full risk assessment had been undertaken.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the findings of the public consultation be noted and support be given to the implementation of the scheme.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation, in consultation with the Director of the Urban Environment, be authorised to make a final decision on unmet concerns, including those as mentioned above.

TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted updating the Committee on the activities of the Town Centre Development Service in relation to the management of Halesowen.

The Economic Regeneration Manager introduced the Town Centre Manager and reported that they would both attempt to be in attendance at all future meetings.

A visual and oral presentation was then made by Vale Retail, who were due to submit a planning application for a new development at the Cornbow Centre.

The development would include a 590 multi-storey car park that would be built according to secure by design standards and would include 40 spaces for the disabled. It was further reported that a deal had recently been completed with Asda to open a store within the development that would attract 400 new jobs for local people. An exhibition would be also held on 6th–9th April, 2005 in the Shopping Centre on Hagley Mall Road and feedback from consultation would be fed into the planning application.

Following the presentation the Chairman suggested that a further report be submitted to a future meeting to enable a fuller discussion to take place on the item.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted and support given to the work of the Town Centres Development Teams.
- (2) That the presentation from Vale Retail be received and noted and that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

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THE LEASOWES RESTORATION

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the progress of the historic restoration of Leasowes Park.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report be noted and further update reports be submitted, in due course, on the progress of the restoration.

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ST GEORGE'S DAY OF CELEBRATION – HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the progress made in the organisation of the procession to celebrate St George's Day in Halesowen Town Centre on the 23rd April, 2005.

The Head of Design and Projects circulated a further detailed itinerary of the event.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report be noted and support be given to the officers' ongoing work to develop the proposals for the celebration of St George's Day on the 23rd April 2005.

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EARLS HIGH SCHOOL

The Head of Design and Projects gave a verbal update report on Earls High School.

It was reported that one of the proposals from the Working Group had been to support up to £4000 for safety improvements and it was confirmed that quotes had been received for the work.

The Chairman thanked the Working Party for all the work that had been undertaken.

RESOLVED

That the verbal update report be noted.

The meeting ended at 9:00 pm.

CHAIRMAN