

CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11th March, 2008 at 6.30 pm
at Dudley Concert Hall, St. James's Road, Dudley

PRESENT: -

Councillor Rahman (Chairman)
Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Mrs. Aston, Cotterill, Ms. Craigie, K Finch, J Martin, Ms. Roberts, Sparks, Waltho and Ms. While-Cooper; and Ms. Little, Mr. Nock and Mrs. Oakes

OFFICERS:

Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management) and Principal Policy Officer (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Principal Project Officer and Area Housing Manager – Dudley (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources), Principal Solicitor and Mr R Jewkes (Directorate of Law and Property)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Approximately 25 members of the public.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs. Coulter, J Davies, A Finch; and Mrs. Edwards and Mr. Sadiq.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ali declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – St. Thomas's Community Games Association, in view of the fact that he was the Chairman of the organisation making the application.

Councillor Ali declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Friends of Buffery Park, in view of the fact that he had been closely involved in the submission of the application.

Councillor Cotterill declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Saltwells Youth Club, in view of the fact that he was acquainted with the Chairman of the organisation making the application.

Councillor Ms Craigie declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – Milking Bank Friends, in view of the fact that she was acquainted with the Chairman of the organisation making the application.

Councillor Waltho declared a personal and prejudicial interest in respect of Agenda Item Number 9 – Capital Allocations – St. Thomas's Community Games Association, in view of the fact that he was the Vice-Chairman of the organisation making the application.

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MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 7th November, 2007, were submitted.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7th November, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the following amendments: -

- (a) the substitution of the words 'a number' for 'numerous' in the third line of issue (1) of the matters raised by Councillor Cotterill under Minute Number 67 (Ward Issues).
- (b) the substitution of the words 'In this regard, the Labour Group' for 'he' in the seventh line of issue (1) of the matters raised by Councillor Ali under Minute Number 67 (Ward Issues).
- (c) the substitution of the words 'disabled parking' for 'residents permit' in the thirteenth line of the final paragraph of Minute Number 62 (Public Forum).
- (d) the substitution of the words 'Summer Road' for 'Stepping Stone Street' in the first line of the matter raised by Councillor Mrs. Aston under Minute Number 67 (Ward Issues).

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PETITIONS

A Petition was submitted by Mr J Payne, representing RESPECT, on behalf of local residents, requesting an end to privatisation in the National Health Service, particularly in relation to car parking fees at Russells Hall Hospital. It was noted that the petition would be referred to the Dudley Group of Hospitals for consideration and attention.

A petition was submitted by Councillor Cotterill, on behalf of local residents, objecting to the proposed redevelopment of Saltwells House and the surrounding area, and requesting that the building be restored and used in a manner which was in keeping with the local environment and of benefit to users of the Nature Reserve. The petition was referred to the Director of Law and Property for consideration and attention.

A petition was submitted by Councillor Cotterill, on behalf of residents of Pavilion Gardens and Saltwells Road, requesting that a gate be installed at the end of the alley leading to the Dudley Wood Learning Centre, in order to prevent loitering and associated anti-social behaviour in the alley when the Centre was closed. The petition was referred to the Director of Law and Property for consideration and attention.

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YOUTH ISSUES

Mr Nock reported on the recent activities of the Youth Forum. He reported that the Forum now had more than twenty members, and that a residential team building activity weekend would be held shortly, with the aim of enabling members of the group to work together more effectively. The Forum had recently secured a grant from the Youth Opportunities Fund, and had also acquired new equipment and office space in Kates Hill to help with their work.

On behalf of the Forum, Mr Nock raised two issues in relation to which the support of local Councillors and officers was requested. These were as follows:

- A request that the Council take action to provide the St. Thomas's Ward with a youth worker, as the area had now been without one for eighteen months.
- A request that the Dudley Community (Youth) Award be dedicated to the memory of Rajpal Singh, a local youth worker who had passed away in December 2007, in recognition of his work with young people in the Borough.

At the close of the presentation, the Chairman thanked Mr Nock for his contribution and commented that it was his aim to further engage young people in the area in the work of the Committee. In this regard, he requested that the Council's Youth Services arrange a conference between local Councillors and young people, in order that they could work together, with mutual respect, to try and address local problems and improve services.

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PUBLIC FORUM

Consideration was given to written questions submitted. The Chairman advised that further questions would be taken from the floor should there be any time remaining when written questions had been addressed. The following issues were then discussed: -

- (a) Several questions were submitted in relation to the proposed sale and redevelopment of Saltwells House. The following issues were raised:
- Concern that the redevelopment of the site would be detrimental to wildlife in the nearby Nature Reserve
 - Who would ensure that the guidelines in the Dudley Unitary Development Plan were met in relation to the Nature Reserve
 - Whether the site could be recognised by Natural England as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
 - Whether the possibility of Saltwells House being incorporated into the Nature Reserve as a visitor centre had been considered

In responding to the questions, the Assistant Director – Environment Management advised that any future planning application relating to the site would be subject to the usual requirements of transparency and fairness, and that residents' comments would be considered as part of that process.

It was also noted that written responses would be provided to each of the questioners, dealing with the issues they had raised.

- (b) Several questions were submitted in relation to the ongoing restructuring of the Borough's library services. The following issues were raised:
- The lack of consultation with local communities, prior to the recent issuing of a questionnaire
 - The failure to encourage residents to use libraries, in order to prevent closures
 - Whether the Council would ensure that centralised facilities were maintained
 - The withdrawal of public transport services close to existing libraries
 - The use of the site of the former Quarry Bank Library following its sale, and how the funds generated by the sale would be spent.

In responding, the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services stated that the restructuring of the Borough's library facilities had been agreed by the Cabinet, which had also agreed that as the issue had already been considered in detail over several years, with no progress being made in terms of service improvement, consultation with local residents should focus on the implementation of the plans, rather than their detail.

The restructuring of libraries had been undertaken following an inspection which had classified the service as 'failing', with a number of national performance requirements, including usage, condition of buildings, and best use of resources, not being met.

In relation to the Quarry Bank Library site, the Director stated that the land would be sold on the open market in accordance with Council procedure, with any capital receipt resulting from the sale being ring fenced for Library Services. The funds would therefore be put towards the cost of the new library in Brierley Hill, establishing 'self-issue' services, the refurbishment of existing libraries and the establishment of Library Links in several areas. In

addition to these comments, she undertook to ensure that a written response was provided to each of the residents who had submitted questions in relation to libraries.

- (c) A member of the public raised a question in relation to the Borough's sports facilities. He commented that with a number of facilities used by children in the Borough being proposed for closure, it was now more important than ever for the sports facilities which had been lost in recent years, including the football and cricket grounds, to be replaced, in order that local children could get involved in sport, both as players and spectators. Councillor K Finch echoed these comments, stating that whereas in previous years the Borough had possessed some of the best facilities in the County, many of Dudley's major sporting clubs had been forced to relocate to grounds outside of the Borough, owing to proper facilities not being available locally.
- (d) A Member of the public raised a number of questions in relation to the closure of the Windmill Neighbourhood Nursery. The following issues were alleged:
- A lack of consultation with staff and parents prior to the decision to close the nursery being announced
 - A failure of the Council to explore the business case for keeping the facility open and boosting demand for places through advertising and publicity.
 - The Council had responded inadequately to formal complaints on the matter.

In responding, the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services stated that it was her understanding that the decision to close the facility had been made due to service considerations, as just thirteen of the forty places available at the nursery had been taken up for the 2008/09 academic year, in an area of the Borough which already suffered overprovision of nursery places. In addition, the Assistant Director of Children's Services (Resources), who was in attendance, undertook to personally discuss the individual points raised with the questioner directly following the meeting.

Councillor Mrs Aston raised:

- (1) concern regarding children in her ward being offered secondary school places at schools which were an unacceptable distance from their home. She stated that some children attending Foxyards Primary School had been offered places in Pensnett which was three bus rides away, and requested details of the percentage of children leaving Foxyards who had been offered places at local secondary schools, and the number of children from outside the Dudley Borough who had been offered places at schools which were local to Foxyards Primary.

Councillor K Finch raised:

- (1) a request that the Council adopt a new policy for dealing with residents who left inappropriate waste out for Council refuse collections. He stated that where residents put out waste which could not be collected as part of weekly rubbish collections, refuse collectors invariably left this waste in the street, following which it would spread and decay, to the detriment of the local environment. He requested that a policy be implemented whereby any residents leaving out inappropriate waste would receive a letter reminding them of the collection requirements and asking that they followed the guidelines in future. He added that this was a particular problem in Marigold Crescent, and requested that the Council take action to clear up the rubbish which had already accumulated in that area.

Councillor Ms Craigie raised:

- (1) a request that the water fountain and the statue of Duncan Edwards in Dudley High Street, and the statue of the Earl of Dudley in Castle Street, be cleaned up, as they had become dirty and unsightly.
- (2) concern that she had not yet received a response an issue she had raised previously with officers in relation to parking around Russells Hall Hospital, particularly in Ashenhurst Road. She requested that a response be provided to her as quickly as possible.
- (3) a request that rubble which had accumulated in the vicinity of Himley Road and Whitehall Drive be removed as quickly as possible.
- (4) thanks to Council officers for their work in securing the provision of a school crossing in Overfield Road.

Councillor Mrs Roberts raised:

- (1) concern regarding a hand car wash which was currently operating at the corner of Waterloo Street and Wellington Road. She reported that hosepipes were being used, although apparently the premises had no mains water supply. In addition, it appeared that the operation of the car wash was placing additional pressure on drainage in the area. She requested that the Council investigate these issues and take appropriate action if necessary.

Councillor J Martin raised:

- (1) concern regarding traffic signage in Darby End. He reported that a number of traffic signs in that area had been damaged or removed, with the effect that heavy goods vehicles had been using the area as a 'run through' to avoid traffic. He requested that the Council investigate the matter and where necessary arrange for signs to be replaced.

- (2) concern regarding traffic signage in shopping areas in Netherton. He reported that signs indicating waiting times and parking restrictions in the town had been damaged or removed, and requested that the Council investigate the matter and where necessary arrange for signs to be replaced.
- (3) concern regarding air quality in the Netherton area. He reported that a recent study had confirmed that air quality in the Netherton area was officially the worst in the Borough, and requested that the Council take major steps to deal with this problem and improve the quality of life for people living and working in the area.

Councillor Rahman raised:

- (1) support for the concerns expressed by Councillor J Martin in relation to air quality in the Netherton area. He reiterated his previous request that an area action plan be drawn up for Netherton Town Centre, in order to coordinate efforts to improve the environment, and to bring about economic regeneration by attracting investment.
- (2) a request that the Council replace or repair a crash barrier in Cole Street which had recently been severely damaged.
- (3) concern regarding evidence of drug dealing in his Ward. He reported that walking around his Ward recently he had noticed that a number of telephone lines had had pairs of trainers hung over them. He had since found out that this was a signal used by drug dealers to indicate that drugs were available. He requested that the trainers be removed as quickly as possible and that all possible efforts be made to reduce and prevent drug dealing in the area.
- (4) thanks to Council officers for cleaning up the area of land in Windmill End which had been discussed at the previous meeting of the Committee. He reported, however, that the fencing which had been erected in the area was dangerous to the public and requested, therefore, that officers revisit the issue to ensure that the fencing was made safe.
- (5) a request that potholes in Walker Street, Griffin Street, Withymoor Road, Cole Street, St. Peters Road and Holly Hall Road be repaired as soon as possible.
- (6) thanks to all officers associated with the Committee for their work in dealing with issues raised by the Committee. He commented that cooperation between the public, local Councillors and Council officers could lead to real progress, as had been shown in relation to a number of issues.

Councillor Waltho raised:

- (1) thanks to a number of Council officers, particularly in the Environment Management Department, for resolving a number of issues he had raised recently on behalf of local residents.

Councillor Ali raised:

- (1) concern regarding the Council's response to issues he had raised at the previous meeting of the Committee in relation to traffic calming at Bunns Lane and Watson's Green Road. He commented that the 'assessment' of these problems in the 2008-9 financial year was unnecessary and inadequate, as the safety issues in the area were already well known and required immediate attention to prevent a major accident.
- (2) concern that he had not received a response in relation to a petition he had submitted to the previous meeting of the Committee on behalf of local residents, concerning anti-social behaviour emanating from a particular property in that road. He requested that an update on this issue be provided to him as soon as possible.
- (3) a request that a report concerning an issue he had raised previously in relation to the possibility of holding a Central Dudley Area Community Games in 2010 which engaged local schools, businesses and residents, along the lines of the St. Thomas's Games, be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Cotterill raised:

- (1) concern in relation to traffic safety at the junction of Saltwells Road and Dudley Wood Road. He reported that a major accident had recently occurred at the junction, near to the Woodman public house, and requested that the Council install traffic lights in order to prevent further problems occurring.
- (2) a request that the Council take action to alleviate flooding problems at the bottom of Stoney Lane where that road met with Saltwells Road.
- (3) a request that a zebra crossing be installed at the bottom of Bowling Green Road, near to the Cottage Spring public house, in order that children could cross the road safely.
- (4) concern regarding speeding on the stretch of Cradley Road between the canal bridge and the Golden Cross public house. He requested that traffic calming measures be implemented or speed cameras erected in that area.

- (5) an issue in relation to the manner in which 'out of hours' switchboard operators dealt with Local Authority tenants who contacted the Council to report problems with their homes. He reported that when an elderly constituent of his recently telephoned late at night to report a broken door window, the response of the Council had focused on the cost to the resident of replacing the window, rather than the practicalities of getting it replaced as quickly as possible. He requested that Council officers deal with calls of this nature in a more sensitive, sympathetic way, as the elderly residents involved were already in a particularly stressful situation.
- (6) concern that the resurfacing of Gloucester Road and Bowling Green Road, although supported by officers earlier in the year, had not yet taken place. He requested that these works be identified as a priority in the new financial year, and carried out as soon as possible.

Councillor Ms While-Cooper raised:

- (1) support for the comments made earlier in the meeting in relation to Windmill Neighbourhood Nursery. She commented that communication with local Councillors and the affected parents had been wholly inadequate, with a number of families now being left with just one month in which to find alternative nursery places which were appropriate, affordable and practical. She requested that in future when issues like this arose, the Council take steps to consult with the affected residents and the local Councillors, before a decision was taken.

RESOLVED

That the issues requiring investigation or a response be referred to the Directorates responsible as appropriate.

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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 Transportation be recommended to refuse the application to purchase the Council owned land, as indicated on the plan attached to the report now submitted, to the rear of 161 Stourbridge Road, Dudley, for the reasons stated in the 'comments' section of the report.

- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to refuse the application to purchase the Council owned land, as indicated on the plan attached to the report now submitted, adjacent to 24 Mulberry Green, Dudley, for the reasons stated in the 'comments' section of the report.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to approve the application for a long lease of the Council owned land, as indicated on the plan attached to the report now submitted, at Castle Gate, Dudley, upon terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Law and Property.

CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

(Having previously declared interests in respect of the following item, Councillors Ali, Ms Craigie and Waltho left the meeting for the duration of its consideration).

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the recommendations of the Capital Allocations Working Group regarding applications made for funding from the capital budget of the Committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the following amounts be awarded to the organisations stated:

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Saltwells Youth Club	Purchase of youth club equipment	£3,250
Age Concern Dudley	Purchase of five computers, licences, software, printer and storage cupboard	£3,860
New Testament Welfare Association	Renovation of outside entrance and flooring/carpeting	£3,476
Milking Bank Friends	Contribution to de-silting of pond and establishment of Multi-use Games Area	£13,000
St. Thomas's Community Network – Out of School Club	Adaptation of rooms at main Network site for Out of School Club	£8,411.07

Friends of Buffery Park	Contribution to resurfacing of derelict tennis courts to create Multi-use Games Area	£5,000
St. Thomas's Community Games Association	Contribution to range of equipment to be used during Community Games and by the local community.	£5,000

- (2) That the application submitted by Saltwells Youth Club for £3250 for the purchase of youth club equipment be deferred, pending the receipt of the necessary supporting documentation.
- (3) That the Area Liaison Officer be authorised to carry out the agreed actions within the control procedures.
- (4) The Area Liaison Officer be authorised to renew efforts to encourage further grant bids through Committee advertising, press releases and communication with community and voluntary organisations through the Dudley Council for Voluntary Service and Dosti.

84

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE PREFERRED OPTIONS FOR THE JOINT CORE STRATEGY FOR THE BLACK COUNTRY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the timescale and process for consultation on the preferred options for the Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country.

It was reported at the meeting that the consultation on the Joint Core Strategy would commence on 17th March, 2008, not 29th February, as was stated in the report, and would run for a six week period until 28th April, 2008.

RESOLVED

That the information on the timescale and process for consultation on the preferred options for the Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country, as contained in the report submitted, be noted.

85

HIGHWAYS SAFETY SCHEMES CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2008/2009

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the proposed programmes of work for Local Safety Schemes, Pedestrian Crossings and Safer Routes to School within the Central Dudley Area for the 2008/09 financial year. Details of the proposals were appended to the report.

Arising from consideration of the report, Councillor Ali raised an issue in relation to the proposed creation of a one-way system in Union Street, stating that the implementation of such a scheme would exacerbate the problems residents of St. Thomas's Ward already experienced when trying to access Dudley town centre, as they would have to take considerably longer routes into town. He informed the meeting that, for this reason, the Ward Councillors for St. Thomas's could not support that particular proposal.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information in relation to the proposed programmes of work for Local Safety Schemes, Pedestrian Crossings and Safer Routes to School within the Central Dudley Area for the 2008/09 financial year, as contained in the report submitted, be noted.
- (2) That, subject to the comments by the Councillors for St. Thomas's Ward in relation to the proposed creation of a one-way system in Union Street, as outlined above, the proposed programmes of work for Local Safety Schemes, Pedestrian Crossings and Safer Routes to School within the Central Dudley Area for the 2008/09 financial year, as contained in the appendix to the report submitted, be endorsed.

TRAFFIC AT NORTHFIELD ROAD/HALESOWEN ROAD, NETHERTON

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on ongoing investigations regarding the junction of Halesowen Road and Northfield Road, Netherton. The report, which had been requested at the previous meeting of the Committee, contained statistical information in relation to the volume of traffic, both pedestrian and vehicular, which passed through the junction, the number of accidents recorded at the site in the last three years, and the possibilities for re-modelling the junction, including the provision of signals to regulate traffic.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information in relation to ongoing investigations regarding the junction of Halesowen Road and Northfield Road, Netherton, as contained in the report submitted, be noted.

- (2) That approval be given to the proposal that further investigative work be undertaken with a view to an improvement being made at the junction.
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87 URBAN ENVIRONMENT - MATTERS RAISED AT CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE – 22ND JANUARY, 2008

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on a number of issues relating to that Directorate which had been raised at the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd January, 2008.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and the Appendix to the report submitted, be noted.

88 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.

89 DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the dates and venues of future meetings of the Committee would be advertised when determined in the new Municipal year.

90 CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

This being the final meeting of the Committee in the current Municipal year, the Chairman thanked the elected Members, officers, and members of the public for their ongoing work and their contributions to meetings of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.00pm

CHAIRMAN

CDAC/80