

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday 25th January, 2006, at 6.30 p.m.
at Halesowen College, Whittingham Road, Halesowen

PRESENT

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

Officers

Area Liaison Officer, Director of Law and Property, Assistant Director (Community Education Division), Head of Policy (Executive and Support), Principal Engineer (Transportation Policy), Senior Engineer, Head of Design and Projects, Town Centre Manager (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Senior Solicitor (Gary Collins) and Mrs M Johal (Directorate of Law and Property)

Approximately 35 members of the public were in attendance.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Special Meeting of the Committee held on 7th December, 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed subject to the deletion of Councillor Ms Partridge from those present as she had submitted an apology.

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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 Body declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No 9 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of him being a Trustee for the James Grove Recreation and Sports Ground Trust.

Councillor Burston declared personal interests in respect of Agenda Item No 12 (Earls High School Foundation – Final Accounts) in view of him being a Governor for Earls High School and Agenda Item No 13 (Halesowen Bus Station Redevelopment) in view of him being employed by Centro.

Councillor James declared personal and prejudicial interests in respect of Agenda Item No 9 (Delegated Capital Budget) in view of him being a Trustee for the James Grove Recreation and Sports Ground Trust, Agenda Item No 12 (Earls High School Foundation – Final Accounts) in view of him being a Governor for Earls High School and Agenda Item No 13 (Halesowen Bus Station Redevelopment) in view of being a Member of the Development Control Committee.

Councillor Taylor declared personal interests in respect of Agenda Item No 9 (Delegated Capital Budget) and Agenda Item No 16 (The Leasowes Restoration) in view of him being a Member of Friends of Leasowes Park.

Councillor J Woodall declared personal interests in respect of Agenda Item No 9 (Delegated Capital Budget) and Agenda Item No 16 (The Leasowes Restoration) in view of him being a Member of Friends of Leasowes Park.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Boys, Mrs Dunn and Mrs Shakespeare.

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PETITIONS

The following petitions were submitted and referred to the officers shown for attention:

- (a) A petition containing 1500 signatures had been submitted to the Brierley Hill Area Committee in respect of the proposed increase in hire charges for the hire of Dudley Concert Hall, Stourbridge Town Hall, Brierley Civic Hall and the Cornbow Hall which would impact on local charities, fund raising organisations and similar local community groups in that it was considered that they would not be able to offer many of their functions and would cease to exist. The petition had been referred to the Director of the Urban Environment.
- (b) Our Lady and St Kenelm on behalf of residents of Halesowen in respect of the fast-progressing decline and degeneration of Halesowen Town Centre, in particular, deploring the lack of a reputable and “quality” supermarket and concerns that current planning had been short-sighted and grossly inadequate. The petition had been referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration.

- (c) From residents of Halesowen about a number of youths loitering in and around the public walkway leading from Beecher Road East into Abbey Crescent and Fatherless Barn Crescent, in that there had been a number of incidents during this time where buildings and property in that area had been vandalised. The petition requested the local police to recognise the area as a “hot spot” to prevent any further possibilities of anti social behaviour occurring. The petition had been referred to the Community Safety Team for consideration.
 - (d) From residents of Butchers Lane requesting that the Council provide the funds for the provision of a car park on the land that had already been allocated for this purpose in Butchers Lane. The petition had been referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration.
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YOUTH ISSUES

A member of the Youth Parliament briefly gave an update on what had been achieved to date. She informed the meeting that young people were genuinely interested in dance and volunteers had recently performed a show at Leasowes Theatre, which had been a success with over 100 people attending. The majority of young people had indicated that they enjoyed dance and, to ensure that they had somewhere to go and to perform, an application for funding had been submitted to help with the setting up of a dance studio and to upgrade current equipment.

RESOLVED

That the verbal update be noted and that the application for funding be received.

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PRESENTATION BY THE POLICE

The Chairman reported that the Police were in attendance to briefly report on neighbourhood policing.

Mr Richard Friel, Acting Chief Inspector reported that West Midlands Police were on target in relation to combating burglaries and crime in Halesowen. The area was also performing well in combating anti social behaviour and drugs due to help by the Police Community Service Officers (PCSO's). Mention was however made of a recent incident in Halesowen involving an armed robbery on a Securicor van whereby the offenders had taken off at high speed in a stolen car resulting in an accident involving three cars. With public help however the armed robbers were eventually arrested and charged with offences.

In relation to neighbourhood policing it was reported that the Police were proposing to introduce, with effect from Easter 2006, a new policing model based on neighbourhoods, to replace the current sector based policing arrangements. Local people would be consulted before the new arrangements were implemented but it was further commented that if anyone wished to express their views they could do so in writing, by telephone or by visiting their local police station.

Mr Friel then introduced Inspector Neil Hodson who had replaced Inspector Kevin Ludwig. Mr Hodson then briefly explained his background.

A member of the public who had previously submitted a written question expressed concern at the unsafe highway on the brow of Mucklow Hill. He explained that there were regular "near-miss" accidents and referred to a recent incident that was nearly fatal. He commended the police on taking prompt action and advised that they were aware of all accidents. It was requested that a meeting involving local Councillors, the Member of Parliament, the Head of Traffic and Road Safety should be held on site with residents to witness incidents.

In responding a Member representing Halesowen North Ward advised that she and her colleagues would be happy to meet on site and it was indicated that Members from the Halesowen South Ward might also like to be involved. It was further reported discussions were being held with Council Officers, the Highways Agency and the Police and all incidents were being recorded. There were plans to introduce safety measures including improving and enlarging the island. A Member further reported that a letter had been sent to a resident indicating that the matter was being pursued.

A question and answer session then followed and Members expressed concern at the proposals to merge police forces, which it was considered would result in local focus being lost.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the verbal update report by the Police be noted.
- (2) That the Director of the Urban Environment be requested to arrange a site meeting at Mucklow Hill, as indicated above, with local Councillors, the Head of Traffic and Road Safety and residents with a view to taking action.

PUBLIC FORUM

- (a) A resident complained about G Clancey Limited and Fish 4 Dogs Limited and asked what the Council was doing about the smell and pollution that emanated from the premises. Residents living up to a mile of the premises were being affected and damage was being caused to the exterior paintwork of houses and windows and cars were pitted. Also, residents could not hang out their washing due to the smell, which also affected the soil in gardens and the interior of the house.

Members agreed with the comments made and acknowledged that action should be taken and it was agreed that a report on the issues be presented to the next meeting.

- (b) Questions were asked in relation to the supermarkets in Halesowen and it was queried what action the Council were taking to ensure that the development of Halesowen took place as quickly as possible.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) advised that the situation in relation to Vale Retail and the Asda proposal was nearing conclusion and he gave a commitment that efforts would be made to commence with the development as soon as possible.

- (c) Reference was made to the previous application in relation to the telephone mast outside Huntingtree Primary School that had been refused. It was reported that a further application had been made at the same place and it was queried whether support would be given to reject this application also.

Members commented that representations to oppose the application could be made, however the decision lay with the Development Control Committee. It was commented that consideration should be given to setting up a body whereby mobile telephone companies could liaise with officers of the Council with a view to reaching solutions on masts and to discuss ways on a more safe and reasonable way to use mobile telephones. It was further commented that mobile telephone companies should be requested to invest in better technology, which did not impact on people's health.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) confirmed that an application had been received. There had also been a lot of objections and the Development Control Committee would decide upon the matter in approximately six weeks time.

- (d) A written question was received from the Halesowen Abbey Trust querying the details of the Development Control decision to refuse retrospective planning permission for the flood barrier on the Scheduled Monument of the Halesowen Abbey and instigation of enforcement action for the total removal of the unauthorised work within six months.

The Planning Manager, Directorate of the Urban Environment would respond in writing direct to the questioner.

- (e) A written question was received requesting details on the general maintenance budget for Leasowes Park.

The Head of Design and Projects would respond in writing direct to the questioner.

- (f) A resident complained about the withdrawal of the No 139 bus and queried whether it would be reinstated as residents sometimes had to wait up to forty minutes for the No 140 service to Birmingham. It was further commented that people had resorted to using their cars due to the appalling service.

It was reported that from 26th February 2006, Travel West Midlands had confirmed that they would be reinstating some of the buses that had recently been withdrawn. The No 19 bus would be operating via Halesowen Road/Mucklow Hill offering an extra three peak period buses per hour. A new service, No 110, was also being introduced resulting in extra buses for the area.

- (g) A resident referred to the petition that had been submitted earlier and queried the estimated figure of £365,000 to provide off road car parking in Butchers Lane. Complaints were also made in relation to the excessive speed of cars on Butchers Lane. A Member further commented that he had, on a number of occasions, requested that the speed limit be reduced.

The Area Liaison Officer advised that the estimate had been prepared professionally and resources for that type of investment were not available. He undertook to refer the matter of speeding to the relevant Officer.

- (h) A question was asked querying how, when and where the surveys regarding the Budget and Council Tax were carried out.

The Area Liaison Officer advised that the surveys were conducted in October last year using the Citizens Panel. The questionnaire was also made available on the internet and 1300 responses had been received.

- (i) The position on the future of the Safeway (Morrisons) site was queried.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to respond in writing direct to the questioner.

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WARD ISSUES

(a) Councillor K Turner

- (i) Thanked officers for agreeing to the installation of speed visors on Dunstall Road/Rosemary Road/Lansdowne Road. However, it was reported that there had been three recent accidents on Huntingtree Road and Hagley Road and it was queried whether speed visors could also be extended to those roads.
- (ii) It was again requested that consideration be given to erecting signs on the entrance of Fatherless Barn alerting motorists that they were entering a residential area. A verbal assurance that consideration to Parkside Road becoming a one-way street had been given, however it was further requested that consideration be given to the introduction of a local safety scheme to include a reduction in speed from 30 mph to 20 mph to combat the speed on the estate.

(b) Councillor Mrs Faulkner

- (i) Informed the meeting that the Shell Corner Partnership and the five Sub Groups were progressing well.
- (ii) Reported that a meeting was being held on 22nd February, 2006 at 7pm at Halesbury Special School regarding a Multi Use Game Area in relation to Hurst Green Park and discussions would take place on forming Friends of the Park Group.

(c) Councillor Body

Referred to a petition that had previously been submitted in relation to a request to close alleyways between High Town and Furlong Lane. It was requested that petitioners be written to regarding progress on the matter.

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CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

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

RESOLVED

That Agenda Item No 10 be considered as the next item of business followed by Agenda Item Nos 13 and 14.

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MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted on the Members' Code of Conduct so as to raise public awareness of the existence of the code.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report now submitted be noted.

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HALESOWEN BUS STATION – REDEVELOPMENT

(Having previously declared a prejudicial interest in this matter, Councillor James withdrew from the meeting at the consideration of this item).

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the Planning Application made by Centro to expand and redevelop Halesowen Bus Station.

The Principal Engineer (Transportation Policy) and a representative from Centro briefly reported on the proposed plans.

A question and answer session then followed and concern was expressed at the lack of consultation that had taken place.

RESOLVED

That support be given to Centro's proposals as detailed in the Planning Application.

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SHELL CORNER FEASIBILITY STUDY

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on a feasibility study on proposed environmental improvements at Shell Corner, together with three proposed improvement options, and on a request to purchase Council owned land off Maple Road.

It was reported that the Shell Corner Partnership Sub-Group for the Environment had recently met and considered all three options and that Option 1 had been the favoured. The Group were also requesting that consideration should be given to parking for a limited time to maximise car parking spaces. Improvements into pedestrian access and safety should also be considered.

It was also reported that a letter had been received from Travel Ludlows supporting Option 1.

The Area Liaison Officer suggested that approval should be given in principle to improvements at Shell Corner with a view to allowing Officers the opportunity to consider the issues raised. Consideration would also need to be given to identifying a funding package to support the scheme and details would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report now submitted, be noted.
- (2) That approval, in principle, be given to improvements at Shell Corner as outlined in the report and that a further report be submitted to the Committee in due course identifying the funds available to support the scheme.
- (3) That, in light of further consideration of the options, as outlined in the report now submitted, the request from Colesbury Limited to purchase the land requested, be refused.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE MEETING HELD ON 16th NOVEMBER 2005

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted informing the Committee of the written responses made to questions asked at the previous meeting.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report now submitted, be noted.

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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.

RESOLVED

- (1) That approval be given to a grant of £5,000 to the Stourbridge Radio Station, subject to the Group identifying funding sources to cover the full set-up costs and a review of the business plan to ensure that ongoing revenue costs were covered.

- (2) That approval, in principle, be given to the request for funding from the Friends of Leasowes Park, subject to the submission of further details and consideration by officers who were progressing the overall improvement programme for the Park.
- (3) That approval be given to an additional grant of £650 to the James Grove Recreation and Sports Ground Trust as a contribution towards the Value Added Tax (VAT) excluded from their original request for funding which had been approved by the Committee in November, 2004.
- (4) That the action of the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Councillor Body, in approving a grant of £881 to the 1st Coombs Wood Scout and Guide Group, for funding towards the repair of the entrance slope outside the Headquarters at Coombs Hill.

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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

That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to approve the release of restrictive covenants on land at 56 Stourdell Road, Halesowen, as shown cross-hatched on the plan attached to the report submitted, subject to a condition that the land is properly surfaced with either tarmac block paving or concrete but not gravel, and that the applicant first contact the Tree Management Officer in relation to the removal of any trees.

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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 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.

- (3) That the Reserves Policy be approved by this Committee in their capacity as Trustee.
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TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the service provided by the Town Centre Management Team in relation to Halesowen Town Centre.

It was reported that the French Market would be visiting on 16th and 17th June, 2006.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report now submitted, be noted.
 - (2) That further reports be submitted to future meetings of the Committee on the activities of the Town Centre Development Service.
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THE LEASOWES RESTORATION

The Head of Design and Projects gave a verbal report and updated the Committee on the position of the complicating and unforeseen factors that had arisen during the detailed design of the project.

It was reported that the second licence, due to be issued by the Agency by the end of November, had been deferred and would not be issued until March, 2006. Representatives at the Heritage Lottery Fund, who were funding the restoration, had been kept informed of progress and were entirely understanding of the situation and were satisfied with the steps being taken. Tender documents had been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for approval, who in turn had passed them on for an independent engineer's design review, to ensure that the proposals offered the best blend of engineering safety and faithful heritage content. The design review agreed the Council's design with a minor recommendation.

At the request of the Friends of the Leasowes, a public meeting had been held at Leasowes Community College on 30th, November 2005. The meeting was attended by approximately 100 people and consisted of a talk by Christopher Gallagher, (historic landscape advisor to the restoration project), on the international importance of the landscape of the Leasowes, and an update on the restoration project and details of the current challenges faced. Those present, whilst frustrated at the delays in the scheme, understood the processes and the need to "get it right".

Tenders had been invited for the preparation of the ten-year management and maintenance plan for the site and these were currently being appraised prior to a recommendation being made.

The condition of the paths in the park had been the subject of criticism. The wardens were able to carry out limited improvements, however the scale of the work was beyond the resources available. Working with the Friends of the Leasowes, the Council had allocated £80,000 of Liveability funding to implement the first stages of the prioritised action plan for the site. This would consist of improvements to the wildlife area on the Northern edge of Priory Pool and path improvements outside the Phase 1 restoration area. Landscape Architects had been appointed to design and supervise the work and a detailed design would be completed by May 2006 and construction would be completed by August.

RESOLVED

That the verbal update report be received and noted.

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EARLS HIGH SCHOOL PLAYING FIELDS

The Head of Design and Projects gave a verbal update.

The Committee were informed that, following approval of capital funding to deliver improvements to reduce antisocial activity and illegal parking, steps had been taken to secure improvements. The Halesowen Abbey Trust had installed the posts for the steel access gates to the site. Site signs had been erected advising users that from the 30th January, 2006, access, outside the core times, would be on a key holder basis only. The signs were being checked twice a week to avoid their loss or defacement. The Trust would “hang” the gates to allow closing after the 30th January, 2006, followed by the installation of the remaining timber bollards around the car park to prevent illegal access to the pitches.

RESOLVED

That the verbal update report be received and noted.

DATE AND VENUE OF FUTURE MEETING

RESOLVED

That the date and venue of the last scheduled meeting of the Committee in this Municipal Year be noted, as follows:-

22nd March, 2006 – Olive Hill Primary School

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.

CHAIRMAN