
Meeting of the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Learning – 20 January 2010

Report of the Lead Officer

Healthy Towns Project

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members of actions taken following the last meeting of the Select Committee and the discussions that have taken place regarding the Healthy Towns project.

Background

2. At the end of 2008 Dudley was awarded £4.5 million from the Government's £30 million Healthy Community Challenge Fund. The Council and the PCT worked together to put the 'Let's Go Outside' bid in and were the only area in the region to receive funding. In addition to this, £200,000 of Local Transport Plan funding has been allocated to the project.
3. Dudley is now officially designated a healthy town. Its winning bid aims to improve health and prevent childhood obesity across the Borough and ties in with the Government's high profile change4life campaign.
4. The aim of Dudley's programme focuses on three main areas:
 - The development of family healthy hubs, based in parks and open spaces
 - The development of active green corridors
 - Service Reform
5. There will be at least one hub in each of the five Area Committee areas. The planned five sites are:
 - Silver Jubilee Park (Dudley North)
 - Netherton Park (Dudley Central)
 - The Dell and Fenspool (Brierley Hill)
 - Mary Stevens Park (Stourbridge)
 - Huntingtree Park (Halesowen)
6. The hubs will benefit from physical facilities such as toilets, buildings, outdoor gym equipment, as well as activity programmes, staff and community events. The active corridors will provide improved access and increased walking and cycling opportunities, delivered through the development and implementation of cycle paths, footpaths, signage and cycle storage.

7. At the Select Committee meeting held on 26 October 2009 a presentation was given by the Healthy Towns Project Manager updating the Committee on the implementation of the programme.
8. Concerns were expressed by a number of Members from various Wards with regard to the level of involvement that they had had in the process, both in terms of proposals for parks in their own wards and the programme more generally.
9. The Committee resolved that:
 - the Lead Officer to the Committee be requested to arrange a meeting involving the Chairman of this Committee, Councillor K Turner and appropriate officers from the Council and Dudley NHS Primary Care Trust to discuss the concerns raised at the meeting; (see Appendix 1)
 - following the above meeting consideration be given a special meeting of this Committee be arranged to scrutinise the process and implementation of the Healthy Towns initiative. (See Appendix 2)
10. Discussions were held with officers and Members as to the best way forward with such meetings and it was proposed and agreed that specific meetings be held with the Ward Members from each of the Wards where Healthy Hub sites are to be established in order to address particular concerns Members had with the proposals for those sites, any additional developments that such Members would like to see incorporated within the project and ongoing communication.
11. These meetings were held during November and December and Members raised a number of site specific and generic issues regarding the project. These issues have been taken on board and where possible included in the delivery plan for each site whilst others have been identified as something to be developed over a longer period outside of the Healthy Towns project.
12. Whilst these discussions have been both positive and fruitful and have gone some way to putting the Healthy Towns project back on course, the fact that it proved necessary to have such meetings is a signal that certain aspects of consultation, communication and Ward Member involvement in the project were not as they should have been despite the fact that reports/presentations on the project had been made at Area and Select Committee meetings, consultative events held for each site and the provision of information on the project via both the Council's intranet and internet sites.
13. Clearly this has not been sufficient therefore an action plan has been produced for the Healthy Towns project. Such actions include:-
 - A section of the Members portal should sign post to latest documents, FAQ's, minutes and reports. The special Healthy Town website, which will be set up in the new year, can also have a Members area that will link to this part of the portal.
 - Monthly updates for Members to be sent via e mail. This update will be shared with other key stakeholders where appropriate.
 - Other additional updates to be sent out when needed. This can be tailored to individual requests and sent to one or several recipients as needed.

- Produce Member updates ahead of Area Committees on Healthy Towns. Separate meetings can also be facilitated where necessary.
- Production of Information Booklet on the Healthy towns project that receives monthly updates with project developments.

14. Through these and other actions it is hoped that knowledge of and support for the project will be enhanced at all levels within the Council.
15. Members were also keen to ensure that all future similar borough wide projects built in early ward member engagement in addition to any planned presentations to Area and Select Committees.
16. The Director of the Urban Environment has agreed to reiterate this point at Corporate Board and via the Assistant Directors group to ensure all Council directorates are made aware of this critical commitment

Finance

17. There are no direct financial implications contained within this report. Any slippage in capital spend as a result of the additional consultation detailed in the report has already been reflected in the Capital Programme and will continue to be monitored closely.

Law

18. Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 empowers the Council to take action to implement measures it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the Borough.

Equality Impact

19. The programme is borough wide, inclusive and accessible to all in line with the principles of Dudley’s inequalities strategy.

Recommendations

20. That Members consider the contents of this report, note the progress made with the implementation of the Borough’s Healthy Towns Programme and comment accordingly.



..... **Ron Sims**
LEAD OFFICER TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON
REGENERATION CULTURE AND ADULT EDUCATION

Contact Officer: Duncan Lowndes, Assistance Director Culture & Leisure

List of Background Papers

None

Notes of meeting held on 17 November 2009 and associated e-mails

Present: Councillor Ken Turner
John Millar – Director DUE
Duncan Lowndes – Assistant Director, Culture and Leisure
Ron Sims – Assistant Director, Strategy & Private Sector
Dean Hill – Project Manager, Healthy Towns

The meeting had been called to respond to concerns raised by the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education on the 26 October 2009 to specifically look at the individual issue of ward member communication in relation to the Healthy Hub planned for Huntingtree Park.

Councillor Turner opened the meeting by expressing full support for the concept and reiterated his plaudits contained in an e-mail to Duncan Lowndes on the 17 February 2009.

These plaudits were tempered by concerns he raised in that e-mail about ward members general involvement in the communication and development process for the Healthy Towns project. These comments were particularly pertinent as they were based on a visit the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education made to the Silver Jubilee Park, Coseley at which Councillor Mottram, ward member and Vice Chair of the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education, had concurred that whilst a warm welcome was accorded to the resources, the communication and direction of spend must be set within the framework of the elected members' democratic process.

At the Select Committee visit and subsequent e-mails, there has been a strong acceptance by officers from DUE and the Health Authority that this would be the case. Tempered of course by the need for a degree of objectivity to meet the requirement of the bid and a role for the Friends of Parks movement, who are the Council's recognised representative group for initiatives related to parks.

Given the tight deadlines for consultation imposed by Government, then translating that genuine desire into a faultless engagement process was always likely to be compromised. Never more so than in the case of the key meeting about Huntingtree Park which was held on 26 August 2009. A date when Councillors Ken and Hazel Turner were on leave. A fact that the organisers of the meeting were aware of. Indeed, had the meeting been delayed by two days then both Councillors Ken and Hazel Turner would have been able to attend. Given Councillor Ken Turner's particular early and ongoing concerns expressed about the communication issue surrounding the project, his inability to attend and the inability to re-schedule the meeting was particularly unfortunate. However, there were at least four other Halesowen members at the meeting alongside a range of other interest groups. On the basis of 500 leaflets distributed, the numbers at the meeting reflected around 2% of this circulation list.

Councillor Turner was both unhappy about his enforced absence from the meeting but also the scale and location of residents invited. Of particular concern to him as a passage of e-mails to Sue McGavin, Head of Community Renewal (whose team carried out the

engagement event) indicate, was that for example the odd numbers on Huntingtree Road (clearly given the geography of the area an important engagement focus) had been left off.

As well as concern about his attendance at this critical meeting and the range of the consultation, there were a range of other concerns about the likely development to be funded. He felt much greater emphasis should have been given to the football pitch development in the park and he was concerned about the energy efficiency status of the proposed new building.

He was also concerned about car parking arrangements. While he was prepared, as always, to listen and temper his views on the nature of the development planned, he felt that he had been deprived of that opportunity in a local and public engagement forum. Finally, given that the hub proposals, which required planning permission, were scheduled for Development Control on 23 November he felt that this was excessive haste without a fuller debate. In the event, the hub proposals were rescheduled for Development Control meeting in December.

At the meeting John Millar gave a commitment to review the planned development control timescale and to organise a series of supplementary engagement events for ward members.

Appendix 2

Following the meeting with Councillor Turner and a series of e-mails from the Director of DUE outlining the supplementary engagement and consultation programme, the Lead Officer discussed the revised position with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education. It was felt that given there was another meeting in January of the Select Committee and that a round of supplementary member targeted consultation events had been already programmed, the need for a special Select Committee was not felt to be necessary.

Following this discussion, I wrote to all members of the Select Committee on the Chairman's behalf as follows:

Dear Members of Select Committee

I have been asked by my Chairman Councillor Patrick Harley to let you know of his views in relation to the calling for a Special Select Committee solely to discuss the Healthy Towns Programme.

The last meeting of the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education resolved to call a special meeting with Councillor Ken Turner in relation to his concerns over Huntingtree Park and if necessary a Special Select Committee to consider the wider consultation arrangements.

That meeting has taken place with Councillor Turner and whilst work is still continuing to deal with his understandable concerns about the breakdown in communications, it seems clear that positive ways forward have been identified and achieved.

In relation to the Special Select Committee, I am very encouraged by the e-mail from John Millar to a range of Ward Members with regard to the 5 hub sites that was sent on the 18 November 2009.

My judgement is that this e-mail and the arrangements put in place by the Director of the Urban Environment go a long way to allaying my concerns and what I perceive to be the concerns of members of the Select Committee. To this end I am proposing not to have a Special Select Committee in December but wait until the next Select Committee which is scheduled for 20 January 2010. I should add that I have already called for a further full report on the outcome of the consultation process at this meeting.

I trust this addresses the concerns and that the deepening of consultation activity is testimony to the seriousness with which this issue is being taken and in large measure the result of your concerns raised at the Select Committee.

*Ron Sims
Assistant Director (Strategy & Private Sector)*

Select Committee Members:

Councillors N Barlow, G H Davies, M Knowles, P Lowe, Ms G Partridge, J Perry, K Turner and J Woodall plus Councillor Coulter