

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 22nd November, 2006, at 6.30 p.m.
at Colley Lane Primary School, Halesowen

PRESENT

Councillor Jackson (Chairman)
Councillor Burston (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Body, Mrs Faulkner, Hill, Ms Nicholls, Ms Partridge, Mrs Shakespeare, Taylor, K Turner and Mrs Turner

Officers

Area Liaison Officer, Head of Policy (Executive and Support), Group Engineer (Transportation), Town Centre Manager, (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Principal Solicitor (Mr M Farooq) and Mrs M Johal (Directorate of Law and Property)

Also in Attendance

Sergeant Andy Hinton – West Midlands Police
Mr M Baker – Centro

Approximately 35 members of the public were in attendance.

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Dunn, James and J Woodall.

48 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Burston declared a personal interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, in respect of Agenda Item No 13 (Halesowen Town Centre Bus Station, Vale Retail and Compulsory Purchase Order Inquiry Update) in view of him being employed by Centro.

49 MINUTES

RESOLVED

- (1) That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12th September, 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed subject to the following amendments:-

The addition of the following paragraph to Minute No 26
“That during consideration of this item, a Member suggested that renegotiation discussions should take place for the lease for the Newhall Centre”.

In the second paragraph of Minute No 29(a), deletion of the words “Mrs Shakespeare” and substitution of the words “Mrs Faulkner” therefore.

- (2) That the minutes of the special meeting of the Committee held on 26th September, 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed.

YOUTH ISSUES

Sergeant Andy Hinton introduced himself and explained that he covered a wide area including Huntingtree Park. He referred to problems and issues that had been causing concern to residents and people due to youths engaging in anti social behaviour, including graffiti and littering. A Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meeting had been held to discuss problems that people encountered with a view to resolving the issues. The meeting had been very successful and had had a very high turnout. The main issue that people complained about was the lack of youth facilities in the area. In view of this the Police, in conjunction with the Youth Service, arranged an event for youths on a Friday night to deter anti social behaviour and to give them something to do. The event “Coffee in the Dark” involved a gazebo and barbecue and approximately 60 youths attended. Feedback from the youths had indicated that they wanted to continue this type of event and it was also reported that there had not been any complaints logged that night involving problems caused by youths.

Sergeant Hinton further reported that the PACT meeting had identified other issues including the need for lighting at Huntingtree and other Parks.

A Member commented that consideration should be given to the continuation of official events to include a gazebo and barbecue being held on a regular basis. In this regard it was pointed out that an application for funding from the delegated capital budget would be submitted in respect of facilitating events (to include seating and lighting) for an eight-week trial period costing £2000. It was also requested that upon receipt of the application urgent consideration be given to enable money being transferred as soon as possible.

A Member also referred to the pathways at Huntingtree Park, which were in a dilapidated and dangerous state. It was reported that costs in the region of £30,000 had been given to repair the pathways. However, it was pointed out that this was a small price to pay if it stopped people getting injured. He further suggested that provision should be made from the delegated capital budget to provide permanent lighting as a security measure and to also install picnic tables and chairs for youths to sit on and discuss issues. He also referred to previous requests that had been made to install CCTV cameras. Mention was also made that the Black Country Groundwork Trust would be willing to install a chessboard or other game into the floor at the Park should youths want it.

In response to a query the Cabinet Member for the Environment confirmed that the recycling bins in Huntingtree Park would be moved. An exact location had not been determined as yet but she undertook to provide details when available.

During the ensuing discussion several comments and queries were raised. The Area Liaison Officer undertook to respond direct to the person concerned regarding the funds that had been allocated for work in Huntingtree Park. Concerns were also expressed regarding pathways and lighting leading to the Bernard Oakley Park through Spring, Talbot and Foredraft Streets. Mention was also with regard to uncut trees and the dangerous fence on the above-mentioned streets. The Area Liaison Officer undertook to refer the matter to the appropriate Directorate for further consideration.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the verbal presentation from Sergeant Hinton be noted.
- (2) That the Area Liaison Officer be requested to respond direct to the person concerned querying the funds that had been allocated for work in Huntingtree Park.
- (3) That the Area Liaison Officer be requested to refer the matter of pathways, lighting, uncut trees and the dangerous fence on Spring, Talbot and Foredraft Streets to the appropriate Directorate for further consideration.
- (4) That the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Councillor Body, be authorised, under delegated powers, to urgently consider the request for funding for the application in respect of facilitating events (to include seating and lighting) for an eight-week trial period costing £2000, similar to that held in the Huntingtree Park area.

(a) The following questions were asked in relation to Cradley High School:-

- Whether the land on Homer Hill, where Cradley High School was, had been sold two years ago and money exchanged, which had resulted in the school being forced to close.
- Why had the admissions section advised people that there were no places at Cradley High School and that the school was closing down, which had resulted in pupil numbers falling.
- An explanation of the legal process regarding the closure and statutory notice requirements and the make-up of the School Organisation Committee.

In responding the Area Liaison Officer confirmed that the land had not been sold previously and that there was no truth in the matter. He pointed out that the question regarding the admissions section had previously been answered and reiterated that the admissions section had been issued with a clear script, which had been used to answer any queries.

The Area Liaison Officer then explained the process involved regarding the closure of the school, including statutory notices and the involvement with regard to the School Organisation Committee. He further undertook to respond in writing to the questioners with a view to including details of the exact make-up of the School Organisation Committee and the voting process.

(b) It was requested that consideration should be given to undertaking a risk assessment with a view to having a fireworks event next year.

The Cabinet Member for the Environment undertook to refer the matter to the appropriate Cabinet Member for investigation.

(c) Comments were made in relation to several streets including Spring, Foredraft and Talbot Streets. The adoption of Foredraft Street and improvements made to the surrounding area was queried. Problems that residents experienced included uncut trees, asbestos, under-aged drinking, cars speeding, rubbish being dumped and vandalism. Extra lighting was also requested for the public footpath between Colley Gate and Talbot Street.

The Area Liaison Officer undertook to refer the matter to the appropriate Directorate for investigation.

- (d) Reference was made to the inadequate advertising of planning applications and it was commented that all applications should be made available to the wider community. People should be properly informed and notices should be published in the press and more than one notice should be displayed. Notices should also be easily accessible and available as not everyone had computers.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) acknowledged the concerns raised but explained that planning applications were dealt in accordance with current legislative requirements.

- (e) Questions were raised regarding progress on the proposed one-way system for Alma Street and Beeches Street.

A Member commented that following a public meeting in Fatherless Barn Estate leaflets had been delivered asking for opinions regarding a one-way system for Alma and Beeches Streets. The response had been that 63% wanted the one-way system and it was requested that the appropriate Directorate should investigate the matter together with previous requests to make Fatherless Barn Estate a 20mph zone.

The Group Engineer (Transportation) undertook to investigate the matter.

WARD ISSUES

- (a) Councillor K Turner
 - (i) Referred to the speed visors on Dunstall Road that had been removed and requested that they be reinstated. It was also requested that Huntingtree and Portsdown Roads should be monitored for speed.
 - (ii) Thanked PC Gary Hall for work done and to youths for removing graffiti.
 - (iii) Sought clarification on the position with regard to the telecommunication mast that had been erected on Lutley Mill Road as the planning application had been refused. He further stated that he had spoken to T-Mobile who had confirmed that the Council had not responded within the 56 day deadline and therefore they were permitted to install the mast.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) confirmed that if the Council did not respond within the 56 day deadline the applicant could proceed as it was deemed as consent. However, it was pointed out that upon investigation it had become apparent that the planning application had been considered and refused on 27th June, 2005. The 56th day from the initial receipt of the application was actually on 10th July, 2005 and the applicant had been informed before that deadline. He further reported that the decision had been sent to T-Mobile, the name referred to and to the address given in the documents submitted. However, there was now some confusion as because T-Mobile were saying that their agent was the applicant and legal advice was currently being sought on the position and action to take.

In response to a further query the Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to investigate whether the Council owned the land.

(b) Councillor Body

- (i) Raised again the need to monitor the speed on Oldnall Road as the speed visor was not having any effect and requested that the 30mph speed limit should be extended on that road.
- (ii) Referred to a caged sports area over Tanhouse and commented that it was an ideal place for youths to congregate and requested that help and support be given to installing lights and securing the area for them.
- (iii) Complained about Fish 4 Dogs and the continued smell and queried why they were still being allowed to trade.
- (iv) Mentioned a path from Hodge Hill Avenue leading to Wollescote Park and of the difficulties experienced in getting up the hill.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to investigate the issues.

The Cabinet Member for the Environment commented that an assessment on the smell at Fish 4 Dogs had been undertaken and the results were currently being analysed.

(c) Councillor Ms Partridge

Referred to Clanceys and the ceasing in production and requested that consideration be given to the securing of the area as it could be open to vandalism. People were also worried about the chemicals being left, which could lead to contamination.

The Area Liaison Officer and the Head of Policy (Executive and Support) undertook to ensure that security and other measures were pursued for the site and that monitoring for contamination was undertaken.

53

POST OFFICE – HALESOWEN BRANCH

A letter from the Post Office regarding their intention to change the way that Halesowen Post Office was managed and to locate to new premises was circulated, together with a copy of the response submitted by the Area Liaison Officer. A further response addressed to the Chief Executive that had been received from the Post Office was also tabled at the meeting.

Members commented that consideration had not been given to vulnerable people such as those using wheelchairs as access to and from the new location was via a steep incline. It was also commented that the Post Office had indicated that there was on street parking 30 yards away but had failed to point out that it was always full due to occupants using the medical centre.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the documents submitted and circulated on future Post Office service provision in Halesowen be noted.

54

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH SEPTEMBER 2006

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.

55

DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

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

A Member referred to the application made by Lutley Mill with regard to improving public access facilities and commented that the Mill was a grade II listed building and that the diversion was to prevent any further water damage. It was further commented that the owners of Lutley Mill welcomed children from schools, the elderly and other charitable institutes and it was requested that the application should be supported.

RESOLVED

- (1) That approval be given, in principle, to a grant of £5,000 to the Lapal Scout Group towards a replacement minibus, subject to the Group being able to fund the remaining cost of the minibus of approximately £9,000.
- (2) That approval be given, in principle, to a grant of up to £1,000 to the Over 50's Club at the Lighthouse Project, towards the cost of replacement chairs and water boiler, subject to confirmation that the items would be for the sole use of the over 50's club.
- (3) That approval be given to a grant of £1,500 to the Beeches Youth Group towards the cost of various resources in order that a variety of activities/events could be planned and implemented.
- (4) That approval be given to an allocation of £2,300 for the provision of a bench in Peckingham Street from previously earmarked funds for the Town Centre.
- (5) That the action of the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Councillor Body, in approving a grant of £2,500 to the Halesowen Chamber of Trade towards the cost of Christmas lights for the Town Centre, be noted.
- (6) That the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Councillor Body, be authorised, under delegated powers, to consider requests for funding from the owners of Lutley Mill and the Halesowen Lighthouse Project, up to a maximum of £5,000 for each application.

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted on requests relating to land and property controlled by the Council.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to refuse the application to purchase land to the rear of 60 Whittingham Road, Halesowen, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, in the light of the objections as highlighted in the report submitted.
- (2) That it be noted that the request to purchase land to the rear of Belfont Trading Estate, Halesowen, had been withdrawn.
- (3) That the application for a Restrictive Covenant on Council owned land at Bromsgrove, Street, Halesowen, be deferred pending further consideration.

57

HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE CONSULTATION EXERCISE – PROGRESS REPORT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on progress of the Halesowen Town Centre Consultation Exercise.

The Head of Policy (Executive and Support) reported on the headline findings of the Halesowen Town Centre Consultation Exercise. He pointed out the high priority key issues were identified as being car parking, crime prevention, street cleanliness and road congestion leading to the Town Centre. There was also an overwhelming need for an Anchor Foodstore, concern over vacant shops and a desire for free short stay car parking provision.

In response to a query the Head of Policy (Executive and Support) confirmed that some decisions had been made but that further consultation exercises would be undertaken in relation to the Queensway and other areas.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and the verbal report, regarding the findings of the Halesowen Town Centre Consultation Exercise, be noted.

58

HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on regeneration developments in Halesowen Town Centre, namely, the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) Inquiry, Bus Station and Vale Retail proposals.

Arising from the presentation of the report the Area Liaison Officer reported that a question had been submitted relating to whether there was any provision in the planning conditions whereby people would be provided with a temporary shopping facility during construction of the Asda store. In responding the Head of Policy (Executive and Support) reported that he did not think there was provision but undertook to investigate the matter.

Mr M Baker, from Centro, then gave a brief presentation in relation to the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority's (WMPTA) position. He reported that WMPTA's Transport Strategy Committee had endorsed its continued full support for the scheme. The scheme continued to be developed in partnership with the Council and Vale Retail. The bus station scheme was being progressed through its detailed design phase and its construction would complement the Cornbow redevelopment and Queensway modification programmes. The detailed design stage included defining the exact requirements for the scheme including structural components and materials. As part of this work, certain aspects of the original proposals had been reviewed to ensure they reflected both the Cornbow redevelopment and highway realignment. It was confirmed that achievement of the bus station implementation programme was still anticipated to commence on site in Autumn 2007.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, regarding the current status of regeneration proposals in Halesowen Town Centre, and the verbal presentation regarding Centro's position, be noted.

59

TOWN CENTRES MANAGEMENT

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

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report now submitted be noted and that further reports be submitted to future meetings of the Committee on the activities of the Town Centre Development Service.

60

DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the dates and venues of future meetings of the Committee be noted as follows:-

24th January, 2007 – Olive Hill Primary School
14th March, 2007 – Lutley Community Centre

61

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 8.35 pm.

CHAIRMAN