

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Monday, 17 January 2011 at 7.00 pm
At Redhill School, Junction Road, Stourbridge

PRESENT:-

Councillor Kettle (Chairman)

Councillors Adams, Attwood, Banks, Barlow, Hanif, L Jones, Lowe, Mrs Rogers, A Turner, Mrs P Martin, Mrs Walker and C Wilson; and Mr R Owen.

OFFICERS:-

The Acting Director of Children Services (Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director, Planning and Environmental Health, Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning (Directorate of Adult, Housing and Community Services), Area Detached Youth and Community Worker (Directorate of Children's Services) Group Accountant, Mr T Holder, Solicitor and Mrs J Rees (Directorate of Corporate Resources)

Also in attendance:-

Mr B Warwick (Area Census Manager), Inspector E Boyle (West Midlands Police); Mr C Wood and Ms J Winpenny (West Midlands Fire Service), Councillor S Waltho (Dudley Group of Hospitals Foundation Trust), together with approximately 30 members of the public.

61

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Cowell and Knowles and Mr G Downing, Ms P Shepherd and Miss D Grant.

62

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Adams declared that, as the Cabinet Member responsible for the decision making in respect of Agenda Item 13 (School Crossing Facility for Heath Farm Road), he would listen to all comments made, but he would be unable to speak on the matter.

63

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15th November 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the inclusion of Councillor C Wilson in the list of attendees and the deletion of Councillor Lowe in the list of apologies for absence.

64 RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

It was reported that no petitions had been received prior to the meeting and none were submitted at the meeting.

65 YOUTH ISSUES

Mr Owen reported on youth issues and events organised by young people of Stourbridge, including the recent Dudley Youth Forum which had been well attended. He also informed on the forthcoming United Kingdom Youth Parliamentary elections.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the oral report on youth issues be noted.

66 THE 2011 CENSUS

The Census Area Manager gave an oral presentation on the 2011 Census. During the presentation he explained the need and aims of the Census and emphasised the importance of completing the questionnaire, and urged everyone to complete the form and send it back in the pre-paid envelope which would be provided. A website was available for further advice and information, if required. Leaflets explaining the Census were circulated at the meeting.

In response to comments and concerns expressed, Mr Warwick advised that:

- a) the results of the Census would be published in 2012,
- b) consideration would be given to safety issues relating to the elderly, those living alone and vulnerable people, especially after dark.
- c) all Census staff would wear Identity Cards and use a password system to try to prevent bogus callers impersonating official staff,
- d) the Census forms were being circulated in white envelopes to try to distinguish them from other regular circulars, often ignored by residents,
- e) the forms would be addressed to the householder, to ensure confidentiality and any information given within the Census forms would not be passed to any other organisation,
- f) Census staff were likely to be local residents, who knew the area and would possibly be known to local residents.

RESOLVED

That Mr Warwick be thanked for the oral presentation on the 2011 Census, the content of which be noted.

67 WEST MIDLANDS AMBULANCE SERVICE NHS TRUST – CONSULTATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITY GROUPS

In the absence of a representative of the West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust, this item was withdrawn.

68 DUDLEY GROUP OF HOSPITALS FOUNDATION TRUST MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Councillor Waltho gave a brief oral presentation on the Dudley Group of Hospitals Foundation Trust Membership, indicating that the public had the opportunity to join local Hospital Trusts. Membership was free and there were essentially three levels of membership. The first entailed receiving a newsletter, the second involved going on hospital visits and the third was the Governorship level, which currently comprised thirty nine members. The meeting was informed that forms were available for anyone that wished to become a Member.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Waltho be thanked for his presentation, the contents of which be noted.

69 APPEAL FOR SUPPORT FOR ORGAN DONATIONS

Councillor Waltho then gave a brief presentation on organ donation, and in doing so explained that three people a day died awaiting a transplant. Of the people surveyed, although 90% said they would accept an organ donation only 26% were on the donor register. He explained the process for organ donation and circulated a leaflet and a newsletter from the Organ Donor Register. He urged more people to register for organ donation and indicated that forms were available for those who were interested.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Waltho be thanked for his oral presentation, the content of which be noted.

70 PUBLIC FORUM

1. A member of the public expressed concerns at the unkempt area of the Stourbridge subway and the removal of the ramp at the subway. He also suggested that Stourbridge High Street be pedestrianised, to make it easier and safer for pedestrians, especially people with pushchairs and the elderly.

The Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety undertook to send a written response to the questioner regarding his first concern.

2. A member of the public expressed concerns that local residents were unaware of meetings relating to Swanpool Park and the possibility of a fair taking place at the Park in 2011. He suggested that a Member of the Committee, responsible for arranging such meetings, consider advertising in the free newspaper to enable more residents to attend to express their views regarding the fair.

The Member of the Committee concerned advised that advertising in the local press was costly but he undertook to investigate the possibility of using the free newspapers.

3. A member of the public sought clarification of the current application criteria in respect of whether it was a maximum of £5,000 or 50% of the cost of the project.

In response, the Group Accountant advised that the criteria was a maximum of 50% of costs, up to a maximum of £5,000, except where there were exceptional circumstances, that had been adopted in 2008.

4. A member of the public questioned why an alternative site had not been found for when the current Farmer's market ceased trading on its current site in February 2011.

A Member of the Committee advised that the Farmers market was run by a private operator, who leased the site of the market from the Council. Future siting of the market was a matter for the organisers themselves, although Members of the Committee considered that it would be regrettable if the farmers' market did not continue in Stourbridge.

5. A member of the public, unable to attend the meeting, requested comments on the current situation regarding the reports in the press indicating a possible favourable conclusion of the Lottery application for the refurbishment of the Mary Stevens Park gates and whether, if there was a successful outcome, the monies from the Committee's Capital Allocations budget and the Stevens Trust budget would be returned to the respective funds.

The Assistant Director Planning and Environmental Health advised that the first stage of the Lottery application had been successful in the sum of £116,000, which would enable the requisite feasibility study to be carried out, to enable the second phase of the bid to be submitted.

6. A member of the public referred to a response to his question, raised at the last meeting of the Committee, regarding temporary staff costs and requested comments of the Committee.
7. A general discussion took place on issues related to the proposals to restore the gates at Mary Stevens Park and included:
 - whether funding set aside from the Committee's Capital Allocation budget was invested earning any interest for the account.
 - whether the repair and restoration of the gates at Mary Stevens Park could be considered capital and whether the capital allocation budget could be used for this purpose.
 - Restoration of the gates was considered as capital and the grants budget was appropriate use of funding.
 - whether it would be preferable for the gates to be replaced with less expensive "look alike" gates.
 - Whether there was any need for the gates to be replaced as they did not close.
 - Who caused the original damage to the gates and whether a claim should have been made against them at the time, if not who had failed to make a claim for damages.
 - Restoration of the gates was part of the area's heritage and should be carried out.
 - Work on the second phase of the Lottery bid was being undertaken and expected to be submitted towards the end of the year.
 - Should the second stage of the Lottery bid be successful, restoration work could commence in 2012.
 - There were other gates in the park which required attention as well as the front entrance gates.

Inspector Boyle gave an oral presentation on police matters in the Stourbridge Area, commenting that the recent Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings had been poorly attended. He encouraged those present to attend the PACT meeting to express their views on policing issues, which could influence how budgets were spent.

Inspector Boyle commented on the Police new web site; that the crime figures had reduced over the recent inclement weather, although since the last meeting crime figures had slightly increased; and on joint activities, involving the Police working with Lye and Wollescote Councillors on local issues.

In response to a request from a Member of the Committee, Inspector Boyle undertook to circulate a list of dates of future PACT meetings at the next meeting of the Committee.

A Member of the Committee commented on the need to encourage more use by the elderly and vulnerable residents of the password system for visitors to their properties. He also questioned whether measures could be taken to make properties appear as though they were occupied by younger residents, to deter bogus visitors and burglaries.

A Member of the Committee sought clarification as to whether the recently introduced 20 m.p.h. speed limit on Birmingham Street, Stourbridge was a by-law or an enforceable Road Traffic Order.

The Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety advised that the speed limit was a temporary enforceable Order for the duration of the construction of the new bus station.

RESOLVED

That the oral presentation on police matters be noted.

FIRE SERVICE MATTERS

Mr C Wood reported on fire matters regarding the Stourbridge Area, including joint partnership working to attempt to combat anti social behaviour. Recent home safety checks had resulted in the installation of more smoke detectors. He advised that the Fire Service used a password system to try to deter bogus callers. He also reported on fire figures during the current period.

Mr Wood commented on the Fire Service's new website and encouraged those present to contact the Fire Service. He reassured the meeting that despite cuts in Fire Service budgets, 999 services would continue to be maintained.

A member of the public commented on the overgrown state of the pavement at the side of the Stourbridge Fire Station. The Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety undertook to investigate the issue with a view to resolving it.

Mr Wood also gave an oral presentation on the need for the use of sprinklers in more of the Borough's buildings, following a recent spate of arson attacks across the Black Country. He encouraged anyone involved in the building of new properties to consider installing sprinklers, as he acknowledged that the installation of sprinklers in an existing building was extremely costly. Mr Wood informed that the cost of installing sprinklers could be recovered as a result of lower insurance premiums, should sprinklers be installed.

RESOLVED

That the orals report on fire matters and sprinklers be noted.

73

SCHOOL CROSSING FACILITY FOR HEATH FARM ROAD, STOURBRIDGE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the removal of the school crossing facility at Heath Farm Road, Stourbridge, used by Gigmill School.

A representative of local residents spoke opposing the removal of the crossing which was supported by the Ward Member and Members of the Committee.

Members of the Committee and members of the public commented on the proposals as set out in the report, including:

- The need to encourage children to travel to school more independently.
- The fact that the crossing was well used and considered very busy and dangerous.
- A warning sign in the area was considered to have been erected facing the wrong way.
- Concerns that more children would be using the crossing when Gigmill School's swimming pool was opened up for use by other schools.
- Concerns that Heath Farm Road was used as a rat run.
- Consideration to be given to reducing the speed limit in the area.
- The need for further liaison with the Headteacher of Gigmill School and Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety to discuss possible alternative options, including the use of school funds to provide the cost of the crossing patrol staff.
- The need for a further report to be submitted on the outcomes of the further liaison.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the content of the report be noted
- (2) That the comments of the Committee, as stated above, be conveyed to the Cabinet Member for Transportation, and

- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be requested to delay the proposal to withdraw the crossing patrol until the matter could be considered further following a report be submitted to a future meeting on the outcomes of the liaison between the residents, Ward Members, the Headteacher of Gigmill School and the Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety.
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74 THE ERNEST STEVENS TRUST – FINAL ACCOUNTS

A report of the Treasurer was submitted seeking approval of the annual accounts, as at 31 March 2010. The annual returns of the individual Trusts comprising the Ernest Stevens bequests, were attached as appendices to the report submitted.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the audited final accounts of the Ernest Stevens Trust for the year ended 31st March 2010, as attached to the report submitted, be approved.
- (2) That the Chairman be authorised to sign the accounts and annual returns for the year ended 31st March 2010, on behalf of this Committee.
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75 CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

The Area Liaison Officer reported orally on an application by the No Limits Project, who had not been in a position to claim the approved grant of £638.70, within the six month deadline for claiming grants awarded, on account of having to wait for equipment to be provided by the Health Trust. This equipment had now been received and the Project was now in a position to claim the grant and were seeking an extension to the time allowed to claim. The Acting Area Liaison Officer requested that the Committee give consideration to extending the time for a further month to enable the Project to claim the funding approved.

RESOLVED

That approval be given to an extension of the time available for the No Limits Project to claim the approved grant for a further month from the date of the meeting of the Committee.

76 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on responses to questions since the last meeting.

RESOLVED

That the content of the report be noted.

ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

a) Councillor Mrs Martin, supported by other elected Members for Amblecote Ward, expressed concerns that they had not been made aware of, or consulted on work, which was due to commence shortly on Vicarage Road and Bridge Street, Amblecote.

Ward Members for Lye and Wollescote also expressed concerns that they had not been consulted on the proposals, which would also adversely affect residents of Lye and Wollescote.

Members from both Amblecote and Lye and Wollescote Wards and local residents expressed a number of concerns regarding the proposals which included:

- Why local residents were not consulted on the proposals.
- Why, when work was due to commence on what was considered one of the busiest arteries in the Borough, was Kirkstone Way scheduled to be closed at the same time.
- How long the work would take to complete.
- Concerns that local residents would have difficulty gaining access and leaving their properties whilst work was being undertaken.
- Concerns at the impact on the local bus service and the local hospital.
- Why more work was required on the Bridge when work had been carried out only two years previously.
- Concerns about long delays and inconvenience to local residents.
- Concerns that traffic travelling to Merryhill would not be able to gain access – despite signage indicating that they could.
- The need for large heavy vehicles to be redirected from the bridge.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Director of the Urban Environment be requested to consult local residents and Ward Members from Amblecote and Lye and Wollescote so as to achieve an amicable solution prior to commencement of the work referred to in Vicarage Road/Bridge Street and Kirkstone Way, Amblecote.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be requested to delay the proposed work until a report on the outcome of consultation, referred to in resolution 1 above had been submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on the solution achieved.

b) Councillor Mrs Walker expressed concerns regarding six unoccupied houses in The Holloway, Amblecote, which she understood to belong to the Dudley Primary Care Trust and asked if the Trust could be approached to tidy them up.

c) Councillor A Turner requested that consideration be given to reverting the recently introduced 20 m.p.h. speed limit on Birmingham Street back to 30 m.p.h.

d) Councillor Barlow requested that gratitude be expressed to all staff who kept the roads around Dudley clear during the inclement weather and also to the refuse collectors who continued to collect the rubbish and black boxes.

78 SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

RESOLVED

That the dates and venues of future meetings of all Select Committees held at the Council House, Dudley, be noted.

79 DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED

That the date and venue of the next meeting of the Committee be noted as follows:-

8 March 2011 at 7.00 pm at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Pedmore Fields, Stourbridge.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

CHAIRMAN