

Stourbridge Area Committee - 16th June 2008

Report of the Area Liaison Officer

Responses to Questions

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the Committee of written responses made to questions asked at a previous meeting.

Background

2. At a meeting of this Committee held on 10th March, 2008, it was indicated that written replies would be sent to the questioners on the following questions:
3. In response to comments from a member of the public regarding the opening times of Lye Cemetery and the possible resultant effect on the cemetery should the Council's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) be successful, the Bereavement Services Manager has written to the questioner advising that during the winter months all Dudley MBC cemeteries close at 4.30 pm for health and safety reasons. After this time there is access to the cemetery via a pedestrian gate adjacent to the main gate. With regards to the future use of the cemetery if the Heritage Lottery Fund bid is successful, he advised that the dignity of cemetery users would continue to be an important aspect of the overall project. The Local Authority in conjunction with local Funeral Directors were looking at ways to improve cemetery access within the overall HLF.
4. In response to concerns expressed by a member of the public relating to litter in the Withymoor area, the Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety has written to the questioner advising that a litter collection takes place weekly, grass is cut and trees pruned regularly and the cycle tracks are swept. He acknowledged that the questioner had met and walked around the area with a colleague from the Directorate of the Urban Environment and the fact that the questioner had expressed his personal appreciation for the extensive number of regular actions taken by the Directorate in the Withymoor area.

5. In response to comments made by Members of the Committee, relating to concerns for mobility impaired persons and parents with small children having to walk from Snow Hill Station to New Street station and/or the shops and business facilities in close proximity to New Street Station, when travelling from Stourbridge Junction railway station to Birmingham on account of train journeys terminating at Snow Hill Station, rather than New Street Station, the Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety (Directorate of the Urban Environment) has written to the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive, requesting that planning be introduced for all future train journeys between Stourbridge and Birmingham to end the Birmingham stage of their journeys at New Street station. No response has yet been received.
6. A member of the public expressed concerns relating to a recent planning application which had been refused by the Council's Development Control Committee but had been duly allowed on appeal to the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol. Some Members of the Committee also expressed dismay that the Planning Inspectorate had appeared to have ignored the wealth of local knowledge applied by the Development Control Committee Members, which had led to their refusal for the application, on the grounds that the development was inappropriate and would have an adverse effect on the character of the surrounding area. As a result of the comments made, the Chairman of the Committee has written to the Planning Inspectorate advising of the Committee's views on the matter and requesting an explanation.

The Planning Inspectorate has replied, explaining that whilst appreciating the concern of the Stourbridge Area Committee in this matter, the Inspectors decisions were made purely on their assessment of the planning evidence presented to them. The Planning Inspectorate's letter advised that the Inspectors take into account the number of local representations put in evidence but it is the strength and substance of their content, in terms of the development plan and all other material considerations that they must consider.

They advised that no statistical figures were available for the defined area of Stourbridge, but 55% of appeals were allowed during the year ending 31st March 2008 for the Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council area, as compared to 35% for all other Councils during the same period. For clarification the Inspectorate had also advised that the decision could not be changed nor could any comments on an Inspector's assessment of the merits be divulged.

Finance

7. There are no direct financial consequences arising from this report.

Law

8. Section 111 of the Local Government Act, 1972 enables the Council to do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

Equality Impact

9. The report takes into account the Council's Policies on equality and diversity.

Recommendation

10. The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.



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J POLYCHRONAKIS
AREA LIAISON OFFICER

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List of Background Papers:

Question slips handed in at previous meetings of the Stourbridge Area Committee.
Correspondence sent in response by Council Officers.