

Your Home, Your Forum Meeting Notes

Forum:	Stourbridge
Date and time:	21st February 2024
Venue:	Gigmill Primary School
Attendance:	<p>Councillors: D Borley (DB), C Eccles (CE), P Lee (PL), I Kettle (IK), A Hopwood (AH), M Hanif (MH), A Tromans (AT),</p> <p>Officers/ police: James Skeldon (JS), Alexandra Stan (AS), Carol Tromans (CT), Sgt John Norgrove (Lye) (SJ) & Sgt Imran Mohammed (SM) & PC 1633 Dunn</p> <p>Apologies: Jayne Pilkington, Councillors P Bradley, P Lowe, J Clinton, L Taylor-Childs, S Clark, A Lees, K Razzaq</p> <p>Total Attendance: 55</p>

Agenda item	Notes
1. Introduction and Apologies	<p>DB introduced himself as Chair and CE as Vice Chair. JS advised of apologies as detailed above.</p> <p>DB asked for respect when questions were being asked and addressed.</p>
2. Notes – to confirm notes of the meeting held on 9 th November 2023.	<p>For the purposes of these minutes, where a resident raises a point for consideration, it will be denoted as 'R'.</p> <p>R – enquired about updates from the previous meeting.</p> <p>DB – responses had been received on 21/2/24.</p>

	<p>R – the school charges requesting to be paid for a Tenants Residents Association (TRA) meeting equate to over £100 p/h</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daniel Fildes advised the park is on the priority, £80k's worth of funding but only if lead member agrees. Kevin O'Keefe and Kathryn Jones commissioned park study at a cost of £20k on 50 parks. Only 70 responses were received.
<p>3. Have your Say</p>	<p>Stourbridge Action Plan</p> <p>R - £3m improving Stourbridge Town Centre, not developing the jewel in the crown – the Bonded Warehouse. Action plan should make the most of Stourbridge's valued and distinctive character, an opportunity to build and form a cultural hub – visitor economy related businesses, more moorings and ancillary retail. 8 apartments accessed from Canal Street, there was no attempt to develop the site. Old Wharf Road – 256 residential units and nothing for the community. Has Dudley MBC dropped plans to develop the wharf area – if so the opportunity will be lost forever.</p> <p>CE – There is a regeneration consultation Bradley Road street scene area and comments were invited. There is a shortfall of land and land owned by Revland Development which is subject to private investment and stopping cars coming down Canal Street.</p> <p>R – Already objected to proposal. In relation to the Stourbridge Action Plan, for the benefit of everyone build on the area by the Old Wharf Inn.</p> <p>CE – Raised the issue today (21/2/24).</p> <p>R – The Action Plan is up until 2026. Stourbridge is being forgotten, development will dwarf bonded warehouse.</p>

Tram/Train Railway

The following comments were made and responses provided, as follows:-

- R – Principle mainline railway from London to Edinburgh as an alternative to HS2. What do you want doing with the existing line? It goes to Merry Hill directly and has an effect on towns and residential areas. Will you support me in keeping the tram on the railway? It will be cheaper; the freight line can operate at night and the tram during the day. Will you support tram/train railway?
- R – Vicarage Road by the transmitter is the only place for a stop and I agree it needs to be done.
- R – Off Vicarage Road, barriers have been put up for 6 months, with traffic going the wrong way around the island. Traffic lights are not working properly so vehicles just go. Why is this allowed? There are 3 cabinets at the top of the road.

DB indicated that they are 5g masts and a Government backed scheme.

- R – Do we need 3? We opposed a 5g mast in Wollaston and got it moved.
- PL – It's backed by Government legislation and we do not have a lot of say, we tried to have the one moved opposite the Corn Exchange.
- AH – There are so many due to their short wavelengths.
- R - Amblecote residents object to the height. We require a visitor centre/café, the canal system is very important as is the Red House Glass Cone, Ruskin Mill and Bonded Warehouse.
- DB – Agree and the River Stour and the iconic viaduct. There's a lot of history around Stourbridge.

Discussion then ensued on the Council's structure and political administration.

Stourbridge High Street

- R – What's happening with Stourbridge High Street? Who has a say as to what the retail units can be used for?

CE indicated that there are a lot of shops in the town.

DB – The high street is as bad as some other towns, there are some empty shops

CE – Traders are to be balloted on the Stourbridge BID

- R – Need to sort out the retail side of the High Street

CE – The BID going through in 2025 is to improve the town.

- R – The pattern for success is shown by Lower High Street its like an independent: it is in 2 parts. Could the college be encouraged to expand onto the High Street

DB – Lower High Street is vibrant.

- R – How safe is Stourbridge High Street? The rough sleepers in the town make me feel vulnerable, my friends won't visit the town.

DB – The Police will respond shortly to this.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – There was a shock regarding the budget. TRA’s spending warning. James Lothian and Ian Cartmell were employed and then left the authority, why can the Chief Executive not see this? DB – There has been a restructure within Dudley MBC (Green Care) which has been effective and Stourbridge now have their own team. • R – Successful staff are being promoted, Housing Managers have gone to a new service area. DB – There is competition with neighbouring Council’s. Dudley have more hybrid working and a good team ethic, things should get better over the coming years. • R – 20/40 days to respond to a complaint is abysmal. • R – Will not come into Stourbridge with only 1 lift working (on Ryemarket car park), afraid the second one might break down too. There’s also confusion over who should fix the lift, whether it is DMBC or the Ryemarket. CE – Obtaining old nearly obsolete parts is one of the issues. Has raised this via email now. • R – By the corn exchange there is foliage over hanging the pedestrian crossing. JS to take details at end of meeting and report to Dudley Council Plus). • R – Regeneration looks lovely, with the new street furniture. A bench has been placed by the traffic lights facing someone’s property, who will keep this clean? The area is let down by shop fronts. Do the Council have any power to make landlords smarten the front of properties? The Ryemarket car park has lots of potholes and lift isn’t working. What is the point in planters if in 5 years time they are not going to be used? DB – There is a Stourbridge in Bloom team and the Street Cleaning team are there most days. In Lye there is £3m of regeneration to spruce up shop fronts.
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CE – Stourbridge BID from 1/4/25. Coventry Street looks good as all the properties are the same. The BID could assist in helping landlords unify buildings.

- R – Get residents in, it looks better.

AT – High Street is used, B&M are now there and the Ryemarket has nearly full occupancy. More parking facilities are required and the Ryemarket car park requires investment which has been raised with the Council,

- R – When looking at Lye/Stourbridge, has anyone been to Dudley recently? It's dead apart from students.
- R – Stourbridge town centre is good compared to some, with coffee shops and restaurants doing well. Halesowen BID is doing good for the town. Out of the 4 towns, Stourbridge is a great place. Stourbridge Carnival – David Harcourt has stood down, I'm asking for Cllrs to assist with carnival, some funding has already been secured. Grant funding has been frozen, what does that mean? Do you want a carnival this year? It's important to the town.

IK – Via Cllr Clark, there is a moratorium on hiring and this is frozen until after the budget has been agreed. There's no S114 agreement, there 19% + in reserves.

Discussion then ensued on the Forum's budget situation.

Leisure and Libraries

- R – Are libraries and Crystal Leisure Centre safe?

DB – No intention to close the leisure centre, but the café is a different issue.

- R – There are issues with libraries where the leaflets go, struggled to specify where to place them. When services are outsourced, you lose control. They don't belong to the people of the area.

	<p>DB – It depends on the regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – Read the agenda, great things happening in local area, What are your priorities? Will we hear from you? <p>DB – We will share an update from ward councillors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – What are the priorities? <p>DB – Councillors will give an update on each of their wards, the first part of the forum is to engage and discuss matters with residents – the best is yet to come.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – Council website provides updates. <p>DB – We are visionary with things going on ie. Dudley ice rink, Stourbridge, Dudley and Lye regeneration plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – Do we have any say who moves into vacant premises ie. Subway and Greggs? B & M and Home Bargains are just large versions of Wilkinsons. <p>CE – Home Bargains have seen a 10% increase in footfall since B & M opened.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – What metrics are driving this? • R – Dudley market is abysmal and they have put the prices of the stalls up. Common sense – apply it to Stourbridge. Website is abysmal, look at Torquay as a good example. • R – Do the Council have a say in who the properties are let to? <p>CE – There are different planning classes and this makes a difference. Businesses need to apply for a change of usage, fast food outlets near schools are restricted.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – The start of the demise was when the indoor market was lost. When Wilkinsons went it was an opportunity to have another indoor market, like Dudley, that’s what is missing from Stourbridge. <p>DB – Retail outlets do increase footfall.</p> <p>CE – We have the Smithfield market.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – High Street has perennial problems with rough sleepers. Police and Social Services have tried to assist, I feel sorry for the coffee shop. <p>CE – The coffee shop give him drinks, the community are very generous.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R - All people should be offered assistance. <p>IK – They are, but they refuse it.</p> <p>CE – They accepted a hostel on Sunday and were back on the street by Tuesday.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R – They should be provided supported accommodation. Rough sleepers sitting outside a shop earn a lot of money, the vast majority aren’t homeless, we need to try and teach them an alternative lifestyle. London has different tactics, giving them money only encourages the behaviour.
4. Police Update	<p>SM covers Stourbridge, Norton, Pedmore and Merry Hill.</p> <p>Stourbridge is extremely safe when compared to some towns, in relation to crime/reported crime and business related. I feel safe in Stourbridge and have brought my family into the area. The issue with rough sleepers was a lot worse previously.</p> <p>R – Do not feel safe with youths, gang’s and rough sleepers.</p>

SM – These are individual feelings.

R – A lot of my generation feel the same.

SM – The youths are from the college. There are 2 main rough sleepers in Stourbridge, there were 7, but with assistance the others have moved on.

Police are currently based in Brierley Hill but looking at a base in Stourbridge. This isn't a front office, but where the neighbourhood team would be based.

R – the crime reported is low, people feel vulnerable. What's going to be done to increase visibility?

SM – More senior officers make decisions as to where we are based/roles. There is a new chief, with new plans. The neighbourhood teams consists of SM, plus 4PC's and 2PCSO's and would ensure officers are out on foot.

R – It would be nice to see a car nip around the estate.

R – Why do you walk in pairs?

R – Is an ex-councillor, when was a councillor the ex-neighbourhood officer used to visit.

SM – Agree with what was said but can only work within the resources. Crime and the way it is being reported has changed.

R – How are you dealing with drug dealers in Stourbridge / The Old Quarter? When reported we should have a return call/visit.

SM – If drug dealing is happening, information is put in the intel system, the caller is anonymised. However, we can contact via email so an update can be provided.

R – The email address should be publicised as a line of communication. Do not see anyone walking the streets.

	<p>R – We used to run neighbourhood watch.</p> <p>SJ – Acknowledged issues with drug dealing and indicated that the response unit deals with these calls. Times have changed. If we move the drug dealers on they move onto the next street. We also have issues with off road bikes going up and down the dual carriage way.</p> <p>R – Are you accepting the drug situation?</p> <p>SJ – What do you want us to do?</p> <p>R – Provide feedback, something positive.</p> <p>SJ – There are plain clothes officers/plain cars and streetwatch patrol the hotspot areas, but dealers change their cars monthly and how they operate. It will take time to resolve issues on drugs, off road bikes and rough sleepers. It's not good enough, we're just plugging the gaps. Stourbridge is a lot safer than other places.</p> <p>R – Safe – what's factual about Stourbridge being safer or is it perceived? Define safe. Walk everywhere and can't escape the smell of drugs, son is growing up in this community, If there's a lack of resources, what do you need from us?</p> <p>SJ – Streetwatch groups will give 100%.</p> <p>R – Give us support, what should be done if son when walking past drug dealers.</p> <p>SJ –Lost 50% of staff in the last 6 weeks.</p> <p>DB – Work with the Police, not act as Policeman/Detectives – support the Police.</p> <p>SJ – All Councillors really support us, however councillors can't get more Police.</p> <p>TC – There is difficulty contacting the Police, went to Brierley Hill Police Station and PC took details, there aren't enough officers to work with. Spoke with officers at the top of The Broadway and</p>
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Speedwatch was set up for Norton – we got 1 response. People are encouraged to come forward and help us.

SM – we are reliant on the community – community watch/street watch always with a member of the Police family. Councillors are fantastic with their support. I met with the Chief Superintendent and echoed concerns raised.

SJ – Any car registrations provided will be responded to. Pursuit cars do not have ANPR. Crimes need to be reported.

SM – We recently completed an ANPR operation with 3 cruise cars and 10 officers, we had 2 window tints, 1 not insured and 1 disqualified driver. In Dudley we were pulling cars in every minute. It's difficult to target drug dealers.

R – Is there an easy way to report and send information?

SM – Drop an email

CE – Crimestoppers

R – We need to know how to be your Policemen/women

SM – Email is the best way for information and intel.

R – That's useful

CE – Sent an email to Police, PCSO's then discussed issues and they are being dealt with.

R – Would update the Whatsapp Group and advise of tonight's conversation.

SM – email address is Stourbridge@westmidlands.police.co.uk. Let us know the times and frequency of the dealers.

	<p>R – Thank you for Streetwatch.</p>
<p>5. Councillor Ward Update</p>	<p>TC – Norton – Visited people that contacted and did what could to put things right, green care, potholes, drug dealing and work with the Norton Knockers. Also arranged for the Police to set up speed watch Councillors will talk to people face to face.</p> <p>AH – Wollaston and Stourbridge Town – The regeneration of Stourbridge is out for public consultation.</p> <p>PL – Amblecote – Set up Crimewatch on Facebook and Street Watch. Usually hold a summer fete/carnival. There are problems with potholes, Cllr Corfield gets them repaired as quick as he can, Vicarage Road was resurfaced and the overgrown hedges in Withymoor; Clockfield’s estate has now been adopted.</p> <p>IK – Pedmore and Stourbridge East – There are problems with racers in the early hours, damaging walls etc. Would like to see the Police concentrate on this. 40% of all crime is online and it needs to be tackled.</p> <p>MH – Lye and Stourbridge North – Deal with Council Housing, potholes, parking issues. BRSK internet is currently a hot topic, there’s a meeting on 22nd February 2024.</p> <p>CE – Wollaston and Stourbridge Town – Speedwatch was set up previously and this is going to start up again soon. The community centre is back open after 4 years. Stourbridge BID hopes to start from 1st April 2025 – positive for the town. Lots of ongoing work with colleagues and Police.</p> <p>DB – Lye and Stourbridge North – Life in Lye, trying to make Lye more attractive place and making improvements, thanks to Suzanne Webb MP. We are tackling fly tipping in Lye and working with groups, landlords and litter pickers. 95% of the role of a Councillor is listening and serving you.</p> <p>R – If there is a meeting every month, where is it publicised?</p> <p>MH – The newsletter gives a flavour of what is being done.</p>

	R – Wrote in this newsletter, it's just nice to know what's going on.
6. Date of next meeting	TBC

Time meeting ended: 8:50 pm