

SELECT COMMITTEE
ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND
ADULT EDUCATION

Monday, 7th September, 2009, at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor P Harley (Chairman)
Councillor Mottram (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Burston, Caunt, Mrs Coulter, Knowles, Lowe, Ms Partridge,
K Turner and Woodall.

Officers

Assistant Director, Housing Strategy and Private Sector (Lead Officer to the Committee), Interim Director of Law, Property and Human Resources, Assistant Director Culture and Leisure, Head of Museums, Green Spaces and Bereavement Services, Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery, Head of Sport and Recreation, Head of Planning and Principal Planning Obligations Officer (all Directorate of the Urban Environment), Interim Assistant Director Financial Services and Corporate Finance, Principal Policy and Performance Management Officer (Chief Executive's Directorate), and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

Also in Attendance

Mr B Kirk – Chief Executive – New Heritage Regeneration Limited
Mr P Middleton, and colleagues, L & R Consulting

together with twenty four members of the public.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Barlow, G Davies and Perry.

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SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillors Burston and Mrs Coulter had been appointed as substitute members for Councillors Barlow and G Davies respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd June, 2009, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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PUBLIC FORUM

At this juncture Councillor Mottram made a statement to the effect that the Committee consider a motion to recommend to the Cabinet not to demolish Coseley Baths but to mothball any decisions to allow the Action Group time to work with new prospective partners who want to investigate several ideas. One idea would be the formation of a Trust with several local businesses being interested. Reference was also made to the cost of repairs of the roof of the baths which it was considered could be achieved within, if not less than, the estimated £1 million cited for repairs. Mention was also made that the Action Group had retained the services of a Solicitor and he in turn had given all relevant information to a Barrister in London as they were both confident that they would be successful in applying for an injunction. In conclusion Councillor Mottram considered that it would not be in the public interest to proceed with any action which could result in a lengthy and costly challenge and therefore put his motion to the Committee. The motion was duly seconded.

Arising from consideration of the motion proposed by Councillor Mottram and it being put to the vote the motion was lost.

A Mr Guest, who had spoken previously at meetings of the Committee, then made a number of points concerning the closure of the baths at Coseley and other issues such as the transfer of the Archives from Coseley. Overall he considered that the Coseley area was being degenerated and saw no evidence of regeneration.

He also cited an example of recent national coverage concerning the baths and the Council and commented on these.

With regard to Coseley Baths mention was made of Government monies available for swimming; the adverse impact the closure of facilities had on the fitness of residents and requests made for a copy of an Equality Impact Assessment which had not been forthcoming.

In response to points made the Lead Officer to the Committee reported that an Equality Impact Assessment had been prepared which covered the Sport and Physical activity function of the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

Regarding more general matters he also referred to a letter he had written to Mr Guest on the issue of the Archives and regeneration and referred to issues raised by Members of the Committee, as reflected in the Committees work programme, relating to Coseley and regeneration in particular. He also indicated that he would be willing to make that letter available on request.

Arising from further comments made reference was made by a member of the public to a statement made that there was no strategy for leisure. This point was clarified as having been made at a meeting of Members and Officers with members of the Coseley Baths Action Group and related to a funding issue.

The Assistant Director Culture and Leisure then responded to a number of issues and reported that details of outline costs totalling £2.2 million for upgrading Coseley Baths had been included in a report submitted to the March meeting of Cabinet and so was a matter of public record.

Regarding Government monies available for swimming the process by which such monies could be made available was elaborated upon. Particular reference was made to the fact that the works required at Coseley Baths were for repair and maintenance and Disability Discrimination Act compliance and were given a low priority rating under the funding stream. The Free Swimming Capital Fund was over subscribed last year and the implication was that, given the total amount of funding likely to be available this year for Public Pools, it was unlikely that a bid in respect of Coseley Baths would be successful.

On the issue of a strategy it was reported that there were a number of strategies in place including the Cultural Strategy and the Leisure Centres Review. However at the time when bids for the first round of applications to the Free Swimming Capital Fund were being taken in 2008 a further piece of work on Strategic Assessment of local supply and demand still needed to be completed to complement the work that had been completed at Black Country level. The current position on this was clarified by the Head of Sport and Recreation.

It was confirmed that an Equality Impact Assessment had been prepared for sport and physical activities and covered the whole of the activities provided although it was the case that there was no specific Equality Impact Assessment for Coseley Swimming Pool.

Mr Guest disputed the information given in respect of a strategy.

A further member of the public queried the vision in respect of the proposals in respect of New Heritage Regeneration Limited and asked that a response be sent to her on the points raised.

REVIEW OF MUSEUMS SERVICE

Following a brief introduction by the Head of Museums, Green Spaces and Bereavement Services she introduced Mr Peter Middleton, and two colleagues, the Lead Consultant of L & R Consulting to the meeting.

Mr Middleton then gave a presentation on Stage 1 of the Glass Feasibility Study commenting on the content of the presentation as indicated visually at the meeting and as contained in a document circulated at the meeting.

Comments made related to the proposition that was being tested that relocating the collection from Broadfield House Glass Museum to Red House Glass Cone could lead to an improved visitor attraction; a better heritage asset and a facility of sufficient stature to celebrate the internationally renowned glass collection.

In elaborating on the proposition he indicated the progress of the study; key issues from consultations; the thinking of L & R Consultants on key issues; gave details of performance, market and audiences together with comparator Glass Museum perspectives; Red House Cone site development options; Provisional Option Conclusions and Next Steps.

It was reported that the plans shown at the meeting, but not circulated with the copy of the presentation at the meeting as they were currently only works in progress, would be available for the Joint Brierley Hill and Stourbridge Area Committee meeting to be held on 29th September, 2009 when further public consultation would be undertaken.

It was also noted that the completed Stage 1 report would be presented to Cabinet on 28th October, 2009.

Arising from the presentation given Members made a number of comments and queries relating in particular to: -

- The availability of space at the Red House Glass Cone and the options that would accommodate the existing provision and that stored away at Himley Hall.
- A request that an indication be given at the joint Area Committee meeting to be held as to how much of the collection currently not displayed could be displayed.

- The site visit undertaken by a number of Members of the Committee on 2nd September, 2009 to Broadfield House and the Red House Glass Cone with a request that as part of the consultation process members of the public, including the Friends of Broadfield House, and Councillors, as appropriate, be invited to attend a number of open days at Red House Glass Cone so that they could have a better appreciation of what was being proposed and feedback to the consultants following such visits.

It was agreed that the Head of Museums, Green Spaces and Bereavement Services would facilitate the holding of such open days.

- Concerns regarding traffic congestion should the facility be on one site, especially for residents, and resultant air pollution and the hope expressed that any necessary road reconfigurations would be put in place prior to any such move.
- The need to ensure that if it was ultimately decided to relocate to the Red House Glass Cone that the facility would be Disability Discrimination Act compliant and that lifts would be provided.
- The lack of car parking on the Red House Glass Cone site and the need for such additional provision.
- The need for a mix of interpretative displays as well as displays of glass so as to highlight both aspects and enhance the visitor experience.
- The need for appropriate security to be installed.
- The need for possible future expansion of the preferred site to be taken into account especially in the light of the collection being of national importance although any future proposals needed to be equated to available resources.

The current debate may enable dialogue to be facilitated at a national level possibly with regard to funding.

Following the points made the Chairman thanked Peter Middleton and his colleagues for the presentation given and indicated that any other questions raised would be deferred to the Joint Brierley Hill and Stourbridge Area Committee meeting to be held on 29th September, 2009.

ANNUAL REVIEW OF EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY 2009

A report of the Interim Director of Law, Property and Human Resources was submitted on the Annual Review of Equality and Diversity for 2009, a copy of which was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

The Interim Director of Law, Property and Human Resources commented on the content of the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted and, following his presentation, Members made a number of comments and queries relating in particular to: -

- The issue of the number of employees with disabilities the numbers of which did not appear to have significantly increased despite actions taken previously.
- The low number of employees receiving performance assessments as indicated on the fourth page of Appendix 4 to the report submitted.
- The increasing interest from men in becoming primary school teachers with increases in proportions of male applicants for jobs and training places which may begin to have an impact in the Borough.

RESOLVED

- 1 That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted be noted and referred to Cabinet for approval.
- 2 That the Interim Director of Law, Property and Human Resources be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on the reasons for the low percentage of employees receiving performance assessments as indicated on the fourth page of Appendix 4 to the report submitted.

At this juncture the Chairman left the meeting.

(Councillor Mottram (Vice Chairman) in the Chair)

NEW HERITAGE REGENERATION LIMITED

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the activity of the Council's arms length regeneration company, New Heritage Regeneration Limited.

Following an introduction to the report submitted, certain points of which were expanded upon by the Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery, Mr Bill Kirk, Chief Executive of New Heritage Regeneration Limited, was introduced to the meeting.

Mr Kirk then gave a visual presentation on the New Heritage Regeneration Limited covering aspects relating to the economic context; the approach and functions; financial model and portfolio of property in relation to the company.

He expanded on these aspects in turn indicating how the current economic climate had lead to a change in the approach taken to the delivery of Dudley Town Centre regeneration, and referred to the financial model that was being adopted whereby receipts from the sale of property would be reinvested to bring forward the next tranche of activity. As regards capital funding six sources of external funding were available whilst revenue would be generated from the properties in the town acquired using Advantage West Midlands funding. It was also noted that finance and IT support would be available from the Council making the company more cost effective.

Details were then given of the three key areas of activity of the company in respect of the Dudley Area Development Framework, the Brierley Hill Area Action Plan and Castle Hill. It was further indicated that these comprised the vision that the company were working to and details of the opportunities and potential of each of these sites were expanded upon. Although a vision document had been prepared for the first two sites there was no vision document currently in respect of Castle Hill. The first round of discussions with interested parties had yet to take place in respect of this site.

Reference was then made to the first projects to be undertaken in Dudley Town Centre in relation to the former Crown Public House, 201 Wolverhampton Street; the former Fire Station and Carvers Café, Stone Square and the former Merlins Café and Wine Bar, 203-204 Wolverhampton Street. In respect of the first project it was intended to make a start on this in the near future with completion in the new year to be followed by the Merlins Café and Wine Bar project and then the former Fire Station and Carvers Café project on which there was to be an inception meeting next week with contractors.

Following the presentation given Members made a number of questions and comments.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and the visual presentation given at the meeting, on the progress made in the creation of New Heritage Regeneration Limited and the initial activities that had been undertaken, be noted.

PLANNING OBLIGATIONS

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on Planning Obligations in relation to those Section 106 and Unilateral Undertaking Legal Agreements signed between 1st April, 2008 and 31st March, 2009, and planning obligation monies received and spent within the same period.

Following a brief introduction by the Head of Planning Members commented on various details contained in the Appendices to the report submitted and queried the details in respect of

- The spend remarks contained in Appendix 2 to the report submitted in relation to land at the junction of Dibdale Road/Dibdale Road, Lower Gornal and Brook Street and Bird Street, Gornal and the allocation of monies to the Bernard Oakley Memorial Gardens; and
- The spend remarks in relation to a number of applications contained in Appendix 2 to the report submitted citing Leasowes Restoration.

On further consideration of the information submitted in respect of the Leasowes Restoration the Chairman indicated his concerns regarding an alleged balance of spend between consultant and other fees and those actually spent on restoration works and suggested that a further report be submitted to the Committee to clarify the position regarding spend on the project.

Regarding the first query raised it was noted that the position regarding the allocation of funds to the Bernard Oakley Memorial Gardens, as referred to above, would be investigated and if appropriate the necessary adjustments made.

Arising from further comments made Members welcomed the introduction of the new procedure for Ward Member engagement as developed at a previous meeting of this Committee.

RESOLVED

- 1 That the information contained in the report, and Appendices to the report, submitted on Planning Obligations relating to Section 106 and Unilateral Undertaking Legal Agreements signed between 1st April, 2008 and 31st March, 2009, and planning obligation monies received and spent within the same period, be noted.
- 2 That the Director of the Urban Environment be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on the spending issues referred to during consideration of this item in relation to the Leasowes Restoration project.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF HEALTHY TOWNS PROGRAMME

It was noted that consideration of this matter had been deferred until the October meeting of the Committee.

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QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on the performance of the Council in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee for the first quarter of 2009/10, April to June, 2009.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and extract from the report, submitted in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee for the first quarter of 2009/10, April to June, 2009, be noted.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

CHAIRMAN