

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Monday 22nd January 2007 at 7 pm
at Redhill School, Junction Road, Stourbridge

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Cowell (Vice-Chairman)(In the Chair)
Councillors Attwood, Mrs Collins, Donegan, Jones, Kettle, Knowles, Lowe,
Mrs Martin, Rogers, A Turner, Mrs Walker and C Wilson: Mr G Downing and
Ms P Shepherd

OFFICERS:-

Director of Law and Property (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director,
Development and Environmental Protection, Head of Public Protection,
Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety, Town Centre Manager,
Regeneration Project Manager, Project Development Officer, (Directorate of
the Urban Environment), Assistant Director Legal and Democratic Services,
Licensing Officer (Directorate of Law and Property), Youth Worker, Valley
Road Youth and Community Centre (Directorate of Children's Services)
Senior Group Accountant, Group Accountant (Directorate of Finance, ICT
and Procurement) and Mrs J Rees (Directorate of Law and Property)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:-

Sergeant T Osborne (West Midlands Police); Kirsty Travis, Joe Upton,
Hannah Cooper, Jacob Humphries and Amy Checkets (young people from
The Ridge Primary School), together with approximately 55 members of
the public.

60

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

The Chairman referred to a change of conditions of hire of Redhill School in that the School's No Smoking Policy had been extended to include the entire school building and grounds and that any breach in the conditions of hire would result in bookings being cancelled with immediate effect. She requested, therefore, that all persons attending the Area Committee meeting refrain from smoking anywhere in the building and premises of the school, including the car park.

61

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Adams and Banks and Mr I Green.

63

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Donegan and Turner declared a prejudicial interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item No. 10 (b) - Application to Purchase Valley Road Youth and Community Centre, Providence Street, Lye, in view of their membership of the Valley Road Youth and Community Centre Committee and withdrew from the meeting during consideration of this matter.

Councillors Attwood and Rogers declared a prejudicial interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item No. 12 – Offer of grant by the Cory Environmental Trust and application by the Friends of Mary Stevens Park for permission to hold an open day at Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge in May 2007 and to charge an admission fee, towards the cost of the event, in view of their membership and Chairmanship of the Friends of Mary Stevens Park Group respectively. They both withdrew from the meeting whilst this issue was considered.

64

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20th November, 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the addition of the names of Mr I Green and Ms P Shepherd to the list of apologies for absence.

65

RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

The following petitions were submitted by the persons indicated and referred to the officers indicated for consideration and attention:-

- (1) From young people requesting that the Ramparts Skatepark be kept open. The petition was referred to the Directors of the Urban Environment, Children's Services and Law and Property.
- (2) From young people objecting to the sale of Valley Road Youth and Community Centre, Providence Street, Lye. The Petition was referred to the Directors of Law and Property and Children's Services. The petition also received consideration and a response from the Director of Law and Property, under agenda item 10 b) - Application to purchase Valley Road Youth and Community Centre, Providence Street, Lye.

YOUTH ISSUES

It was reported that youths attending the meeting were in attendance to submit the petition referred to previously and to object to the application to purchase of Valley Road Youth and Community Centre and that there were no other youth issues to be raised at this meeting.

PUBLIC FORUM SESSION

Before reading questions received prior to the meeting and from the public, the Area Liaison Officer stated that any questions which were not addressed would receive a written response from the appropriate officer.

Questions and answers were then given as follows:-

- (1) A member of the public, unable to attend the meeting, had commented on parking problems in Birmingham Street, Stourbridge, despite there being numerous empty spaces on the car parks in the same road. He also raised concerns relating to cabs parked on the island and road junction at Amblecote Road, Delph Road, Mill Street and Mount Pleasant, Brierley Hill, despite the double yellow lines and the large car park adjacent to the public house. The Group Engineer, Traffic and Road Safety advised that he had already responded to the questioner regarding the Birmingham Road traffic issues and undertook to investigate the alleged illegal parking of cabs at Amblecote Road, Delph Road, Mill Street and Mount Pleasant area and send a written response to the questioner.
- (2) A group of young people from The Ridge Primary School spoke in support of their request for a direction sign on High Park Avenue to indicate the exact location of the Ridge Primary School in Gregory Road, Stourbridge. They expressed concerns for the safety of children travelling to and from school, due to heavy lorries mistaking the entrance to the Ridge Primary School for the entrance to Ridgewood High School. They advised that the Governors of the School were willing to provide funding towards the cost of the signage, if necessary, as they were also concerned about the safety of the children.

The Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety advised that he was aware that the Cabinet Member for Transportation had already considered this road safety issue and that a decision to introduce the signage, at no cost to the school, had already been taken. He advised that when a design for the design had been determined, a Road Safety Officer would visit the children to discuss the design and other road safety issues.

- (3) A member of the public, unable to attend the meeting, had requested that consideration be given to installing further dropped kerbs in Stourbridge, particularly in the Norton area, to enable wheelchair users to travel more easily. He also requested that consideration be given to placing metal covers over drainage channels to enable wheelchair users and people with prams to travel across the channels more easily.

The Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety advised that he was aware that additional funding had recently been acquired to provide additional dropped kerbs and further “blistered” paving. These would be introduced in the Norton area. He undertook to speak with the questioner outside of the meeting to identify suitable sites for new dropped kerbs and “blistered” paving in that area. He further advised that the reason for some drainage channels not having metal covers was that due to the style of the drainage channels, they were not suited for metal covers.

- (4) A member of the public expressed concern that, despite reporting a fallen tree blocking the National Cycle Pathway adjacent to Seven Dwellings Bridge, Anchor Hill, Withymoor, on Friday 19th January 2007, the tree was still blocking the pathway. The Group Engineer advised that although the land in question was not public highway, he would liaise with the owners of the land, and send a written response to the questioner.
- (5) The same member of the public expressed concern regarding a question asked at a previous meeting of the Committee, relating to advertising billboards on traffic islands throughout the Borough, and their alleged distraction for drivers. He had recently been involved in a “shunt type” traffic accident, at the traffic island in front of the Mary Stevens Park entrance, which he believed had been caused as a direct result of the other driver involved being distracted by the billboards on the traffic island. He believed the Council had a “duty of care” for residents and road users and requested that advertising billboards, which in the view of the National Highways Agency and R.O.S.P.A., were a dangerous distraction, should not be allowed to be posted on these traffic islands in the interests of safety. In responding, the Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety advised that the signs on traffic islands within Dudley Metropolitan Borough were in fact smaller than those within neighbouring Authorities and not considered a distraction and therefore acceptable. Some Members of the Committee supported the view of the Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety and disputed the view that “shunt type” accidents were as a result of distraction by billboards. It was also considered that the revenue raised from the positioning of such billboards made a significant contribution towards offsetting the costs of many newly introduced safety measures.

- (6) A member of the public commented on an e-mail sent to the Highways Section on 3rd January, 2007, which had not yet received a response. The e-mail had referred to concerns regarding the speed limit signs on the Hagley Road end of Redlake Road, Stourbridge. The questioner included photographs indicating the signs referred to. The Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety undertook to investigate and send a written response to the questioner.
- (7) A member of the public, on behalf of residents of Woods Lane, Stourbridge, questioned what action could be taken to reduce the speed of traffic on Woods Lane, which he considered a busy route. The Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety undertook to investigate whether this route could be included in a future Local Road Safety Scheme.
- (8) A member of the public questioned why Officers from the Directorate of the Urban Environment had not taken hygiene regulations and other legalities, into account, including residents' opinions, before granting permission for new businesses, or extensions to existing businesses.

Another member of the public, making reference to the same planning application, questioned the appropriateness of the comments of a Council Officer made during a recent Development Control Committee meeting, when plans for a new food business, twelve metres from residential properties in Church Road, Lye were approved. It appeared that objections from local residents regarding closeness to residential properties and the already large number of similar establishments in close proximity to each other in the same area, were ignored.

Some Members of the Committee expressed the view that, although they and colleagues on the Development Control Committee were not fully in agreement with the recommendation to grant permission for another food establishment in close proximity to many others already in existence, there were no valid legal reasons for the Committee to refuse the planning application in question. In fact it was understood that the planning application was for an extension to an existing business at the same premises. Some Members of the Committee also expressed concern that it had been suggested that some applicants deliberately flaunt the law when putting forward an application.

The Assistant Director Environmental Protection commented that although she was aware of the case she had not been present at the meeting referred to and therefore could not comment on the decision. She undertook to refer all comments to her colleagues in Development Control. She was able to advise that, in accordance with normal procedure, the Committee report would contain comments made during the consultation period and these would be reflected in the recommendation to the Committee. Each planning application was judged on its individual merit and decisions made

accordingly.

Members of the Committee expressed frustration that some applicants were allegedly exploiting loopholes in the planning regulations to obtain planning permission, which would not usually be granted and that the Council was powerless to refuse, for fear of breaching the law.

In response to further questions from Members of the Committee regarding the planning application, the Assistant Director Legal and Democratic Services advised that although the Licensing Act 2003 allowed the Council to create a Special Policy to limit the number of licensed premises within a given area, the Act did not currently include restaurants.

- (9) Issues raised by a member of the public relating to the request to purchase Valley Road Youth and Community Centre, Providence Road, Lye were deferred for consideration when that agenda item was being considered.
- (10) In support of a petition referred to previously, some young people questioned what the Council could do to assist the Ramparts Skatepark at Bells Street, Stourbridge to remain open.

The Area Liaison Officer explained that the Council had originally granted a lease on the property at Bell Street, Stourbridge, to establish an indoor skatepark as a business venture. At that time a business plan and projected turn over had been submitted, showing projected profits for the first three years of expected operation. The expected turnover and profits had not been realized. Rent and business rates which were payable had continuously not been paid, and the Council now had no alternative but to recover the debt of rent and business rates owed to the Council. Initially, to enable the Company to undertake work at the premises, the Council, in accordance with its usual procedure, had granted a "rent free period", after which time the rent became payable. He advised that the Company owner had been made aware of the arrears on a number of occasions.

In response to a comment from a member of the public on the advisability of the Council allowing the debt to accrue to the present high level, the Area Liaison Officer advised that the debt had accrued over a period of two years. He agreed that the Company had been treated with some leniency, which would not usually be the case with a business venture established to make a profit. This had been due partly on account of the Council being sympathetic to the idea of an indoor skatepark facility being provided for young people, but in addition the Council had been waiting for a revised Business Plan and a proposal to pay the arrears. He pointed out that for a number of years the Committee, together with other area committees, had been working extremely hard to identify suitable sites for outdoor skatepark facilities. This work was as a direct result of numerous and continuous requests from large numbers of young

people, including the Ramparts owner. It was acknowledged that there had been a number of issues to resolve, but that the work on the proposed skatepark facility, for the Stourbridge area, on land adjacent to Redhill School, was scheduled for completion by April 2007.

Some members of the Committee expressed the view that it would be inappropriate for the Council to allow any further delay in recovering the outstanding debt. The Area Liaison Officer further advised that the lease on the Bell Street property expired in the Summer of 2007 and he confirmed that the lease would not be renewed.

- (11) A member of the public, on behalf of parents of children with special educational needs, expressed concern at the decision of the Director of Children's Services to withdraw funding for transport for children with special education needs, particularly in view of the lack of time given for parents to appeal against the decision and the apparent lack of a right to appeal against the decision. He also queried whether this lack of appeal process was against the children's Human Rights.

Another member of the public expressed concern that, due to delays in postal deliveries during the Christmas period, she had been unable to send a written reply to the Director of Children's Services regarding the termination of transport for her son who attends Hob Green Primary School, within the required timescale. The comments were referred to the Director of Children's Services for a written response to be sent to the questioners.

CHRISTMAS IN STOURBRIDGE

The Town Centre Manager gave an oral presentation on events that had been delivered over the Christmas period in partnership with the Chamber of Trade. The town's Christmas Lights Switch-on was very well attended on 2nd December with attractions including entertainment, a celebrity appearance, a Christmas Market, donkey rides and a simulated snow storm. Local schools, colleges and groups performed at Stourbridge on Show on Saturday 9th December. The Ryemarket was open until 8 pm on Thursday 14th December for late night shopping. Stourbridge's street market took place on Saturday 16th December and Stourbridge Churches Together sang carols throughout the town on 23rd December. The Best Dressed Business Competition returned this year.

Plans were already well in hand for a St George's Day event on 21st April 2007 and Stourbridge organisations were encouraged to contact the Town Centre Manager to get involved.

Members of the Committee expressed their thanks to the Town Centre Manager and his team for the hard work undertaken to make the events such a success and it was hoped they would be repeated in the current year.

RESOLVED

That the content of the presentation, on the events in Stourbridge Town during the Christmas period, be noted.

69

TOWN CENTRE TRAFFIC RESTRICTIONS AND ENFORCEMENT

An oral presentation was given by the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services on the recent trial of traffic restrictions in Stourbridge Town Centre on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. The Assistant Director advised that he had received no complaints or objections to the restrictions from residents or the local MP. He was confident that any problems arising from the restrictions would have evidenced themselves over the Christmas and New Year periods. The trial would continue to be monitored and a further update at the end of the six months' trial period would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Sergeant Osborne (West Midlands Police) advised that from a police perspective the trial had been a success in that dispersal of people from the town centre was now much easier. Access for emergency vehicles was now possible and Stourbridge was a safer place to be in the evenings. Clearer visibility of the CCTV cameras also enabled the police to identify and rectify any problems more easily than previously.

Members of the Committee expressed their appreciation of the restrictions, and their positive effect on Stourbridge High Street.

RESOLVED

That the content of the presentations, on Stourbridge Town Centre Traffic Restrictions, be noted.

70

STOURBRIDGE TOWN HALL WORKING GROUP

Councillor Knowles, on behalf of the Stourbridge Town Hall Working Group gave an oral presentation on the work of that group which had included consideration of improvements to the Town Hall and the installation of the flag on the rooftop.

He advised that the next project to be undertaken by the Working Group, was to be the consideration of the renovation of the Town Hall entrance and old Foyer and to have the tower of the Town Hall floodlit at night. Pictures depicting the proposed floodlit Town Hall at night were on display at the meeting.

A brochure of future events at the Town Hall was also circulated for information. It was reported that an event scheduled for the first Thursday in

May, 2007, would not clash with the count for the local elections, as the event was to be held in a smaller room within the Town Hall.

RESOLVED

That the content of the presentation, on the work of the Stourbridge Town Hall Working Group, be noted.

71

APPLICATIONS IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted, regarding land and property within the Committee's area. In response to a question from a Member of the Committee as to why a covenant had been placed on land at Mamble Road, Stourbridge, the Director of Law and Property advised that this was standard procedure to protect land against subsequent development which could enhance land value.

A letter from the applicant, Scot Young Research, in support of the application to purchase the site of the Youth and Community Centre, Providence Street, Lye was circulated at the meeting. A letter and an e-mail, objecting to the application were also circulated. A petition, referred to previously had also been submitted by a group of young people, objecting to the application. A member of the public spoke out against the proposal to sell off the Centre, stating that there was a need for facilities for young people in the area, especially in the light of new housing developments planned for the Lye area. The Centre was much used by the youth and community around the Valley Road area. It was also used by some young people with physical disabilities.

The Area Liaison Officer advised that the recommendation of the Officers was to refuse the application. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services gave an assurance that there was to be no change to the current youth service provision for the Lye area.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Personnel, Legal and Property be advised to approve the application for the removal of the restrictive covenant on land adjacent to 14 Mamble Road, Stourbridge, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, subject to the applicant obtaining any necessary consents and on terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Law and Property.
 - (2) That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be advised to refuse the application to purchase land, on the site of The Youth and Community Centre at Providence Street, Lye, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, for the reasons set out in the report.
-

CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on applications for capital funding from the Committee's Capital Allocations budget. Consideration was also given to a late request from the Pedmore Fields Tenants Association.

Some members expressed concerns regarding the granting of the full amount to the application by the Lye Cricket Club, particularly in view of the small amount of funds remaining in the current budget, and the resulting effect on possible further applications before the end of the financial year. A suggestion was made that consideration of the application be deferred until the next meeting.

The Area Liaison Officer advised that an amount of £5,000 had been granted to Pedmore Fields Tenants Association some years ago for a new Community Centre. However, the Association had not been able to secure the balance of the funding and were therefore returning the sum of £5,000 to the Committee's Capital Allocations budget.

The Area Liaison Officer further advised that the Tenants Association, supported by the Directorate of the Urban Environment, had recently requested that the monies referred to above, be re allocated towards the cost of providing play equipment at Wollescote Park, in connection with the development of Pedmore and Wychbury Open Space as part of the Liveability Project. In response to a question from the Committee, the Area Liaison Officer advised that the equipment would be additional funding for play equipment, which was not currently included in the project.

It was suggested that the application by the Pedmore Fields Tenants Association be considered in the usual manner at the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That consideration of the application by Lye Cricket Club for £4,787 for the purchase of a replacement mower, grass seed and a fertiliser spreader, spiker and loam spreader be deferred to the March meeting of the Committee.
- (2) That consideration of the application by the Pedmore Fields Tenants Association for £5,000 towards the provision of play equipment at Wollescote Park be deferred to the March meeting of the Committee.
- (3) That the sum referred to below be allocated to the following organisation for the purpose indicated.

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Side by Side Theatre Group	Purchase of scanners and a control unit to create lighting effects	£1,870

73

THE ERNEST STEVENS TRUSTS – FINAL ACCOUNTS

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the accounts of the individual Trusts comprising the Ernest Stevens Bequests, as indicated in the report submitted.

In presenting the report, the Area Liaison Officer advised that, through the Friends of Mary Stevens Park, the Council had been granted, from the Corey Trust Foundation, the sum of £32,000 towards a project to restore Heath Pool and the surrounding park area. This project would include the installation of a fountain to aerate the pool and replacement of perimeter fencing around the park. The grant was subject to 10% of the grant being funded locally. The Chairman of the Friends of Mary Stevens Park had confirmed that the Group were in a position to fund this amount, without any cost to Council tax payers. To comply with the terms of the Ernest Stevens Trust, it was recommended that the Committee, as Trustees, accept the grant and for officers to be authorised to negotiate and agree the terms for the acceptance of the grant.

The Area Liaison Officer also advised that the Friends of Mary Stevens Park intended to hold an open day in the park on Monday 7th May 2007, on similar lines to the one held in 2006, to include community events and to commemorate the death of Ernest Stevens some 50 years ago. There was an intention to charge an entry fee to the park on that day and to make a charge for car parking. Money raised would be shared equally by event costs and the Friends of Mary Stevens Park Group.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the audited final accounts of the Ernest Stevens Trust, as now submitted, be approved.
- (2) That the Chairman be authorised to sign the accounts and annual returns on behalf of this Committee.
- (3) That the Committee, as Trustees, give approval for the Project of the Friends of Mary Stevens Park and authorise the Director of Law and Property, in consultation with the Director of the Urban Environment, to negotiate and agree terms for the acceptance of the grant of £32,000 from the Cory Environmental Trust and enter into a “grant agreement” with the Cory Environmental Trust.

- (4) That the proposal for a Family Fun Day at Mary Stevens Park on Monday 7th May 2007 be approved, subject to the Friends of Mary Stevens Park obtaining a licence for the event, in accordance with the Licensing Act, 2003, and any other necessary consents or approval.
-

74

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted in response to a question asked at the meeting of this Committee held on 20th November, 2006.

RESOLVED

That the content of the report submitted be noted.

75

ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

- (a) Councillor Mrs Martin raised:

Concerns regarding the need for the phasing of the traffic lights near Collis Street, Vicarage Road and Brettell Lane to be synchronised to enable traffic to travel more freely and enable pedestrians to cross the road safely. She also commented on the need for the timings on the said lights to be adjusted at various times of the day to allow for the changes in traffic volumes.

- (b) Councillor Mrs Walker expressed concern at the number of new sets of traffic lights in close proximity to the Stourbridge Ring Road, which appear to be causing traffic congestion on the Ring Road from queuing traffic.
- (c) Councillors Kettle requested that the SOGO signs on lamp posts near the Pedmore island, Hagley Road be removed, as SOGO work had been completed for some time.
- (d) Councillor Turner raised:
- i) the need for a direction sign for the Rufford School.
 - ii) the need for clarification regarding planning approval granted for a block of flats in Parkfield Road, where it appeared the views of local residents were ignored.
- (e) Councillor Donegan raised the need for clarification regarding planning approval for a development in Junction Road, where it appeared the views of local residents were ignored.
- (f) Councillors Knowles raised the possibility of closing Victoria Passage, Stourbridge at night to prevent acts of anti social behaviour. The Group Engineer Traffic and Road Safety undertook to investigate and submit a report on his findings to a future meeting of the Committee.
-

DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED

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

12th March, 2007 at 7.00 pm at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge.

77

SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

Information was given regarding the dates for future meetings of all Select Committees, which were held at the Council House, Dudley. Members of the public were welcome to attend such meetings.

RESOLVED

That the information given in respect of the dates of future meetings of Select Committees be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.

CHAIRMAN