

**ACTION NOTES OF THE MEETING OF HALESOWEN NORTH AND
HALESOWEN SOUTH COMMUNITY FORUM**

Held at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 19th June, 2013 at
Olive Hill Primary School, Springfield Road, Halesowen

PRESENT:-

Councillors Bills, Hill, Taylor, Vickers and Woodall

Officers:-

Mr. P. Coyne, Assistant Director, Economic Regeneration (Directorate of the Urban Environment) (Lead Officer to the Committee) and Mr J. Jablonski (Directorate of Corporate Resources)

together with fifteen members of the public

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIR**

AGREED that Councillor Hill be elected Chair of the Forum for the ensuing Municipal Year.

(Councillor Hill thereupon took the Chair)

2. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

AGREED that Councillor Taylor be appointed Vice-Chair of the Forum for the ensuing Municipal Year.

3. **APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs. Shakespeare.

4. **WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed those present to this, the first meeting of the Halesowen North and Halesowen South Community Forum.

Following introductions of Members and Officers an explanation was given to the background and purpose of the Forum meetings.

5. LISTENING TO YOU: QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS

The following issues were raised orally at the meeting:-

- Concerns were raised on behalf of two elderly residents who had recently had problems with their gas heating and had experienced anxiety over follow-up telephone calls requesting access to their Council properties. The questioner was asked to provide details to the Lead Officer so that he could pursue the matter further.
- A member of the public expressed his thanks to councillors and the Lead Officer for the action taken so that Halesowen in Bloom could take place this year. It was noted that arrangements had been put in hand so that Halesowen in Bloom took place in future years.

Arising from the comments made, further comments were made about the need to improve entry points into Halesowen in particular the roundabouts so that if future competitions were entered into a more favourable impression could be made on visiting judges. Arising from this reference was made to the roundabout at the bottom of Mucklow Hill and the action that had been taken by a utility company following planting undertaken by the Council's Green Care Organisation. It was hoped that the work undertaken by Green Care would be reinstated by the utility company.

The need to look at roundabouts generally in the area was also stressed so that action could be taken not only on these but surrounding roads, for example, Grange Road.

The Lead Officer was asked to take the comments made at the meeting about roundabouts and approaches into consideration and ascertain what could be done. He was also asked to look into the position regarding the funding received from the Highways Agency when responsibility for the Halesowen By-Pass was passed to the Council.

The issue of empty shops in Halesowen was raised with particular reference to two shops in the Town Centre. The position regarding these shops was reported on in that they were privately owned and the owner had, to date, not wished to engage with the Council about them.

Reference was also made to local initiatives to improve shop fronts, for example, in Shell Corner and by the operation of "pop-up" shops which were continuing to be looked at.

- Several local residents raised concerns about a proposal to replace the Swan Pub in Long Lane, Halesowen, with a convenience store.

Reference was made to a newspaper article and to a petition that was going to be presented to tonight's meeting and residents in expressing their concerns wished for more information on the process regarding the change of use.

In this connection, it was noted that the proposal was the subject of a planning application and that the period for objections had expired on 6th June.

Arising from the consideration given to this matter, it was, in particular, stressed that objections to the planning application needed to be made on planning grounds and these were outlined at the meeting relating to the possible impact on traffic flows and parking in the area that would arise from the proposal. This was in addition to the concern expressed in the petition, containing approximately 676 signatures which was presented at the meeting and passed to the Lead Officer for attention, referring to the damage that would be caused to existing independent shops in the area by the proposal.

A number of those present indicated that they had objected to the proposal and on the basis of discussions at tonight's meeting would consider putting in further objections on the grounds indicated. In addition, a further cause for concern was the early delivery of goods to the shop and the early arrival of staff to deal with items such as newspapers. All these matters would lead to further inconvenience to local residents.

- In response to a query as to whether charity shops paid rent, a response was given to the effect that a reduced amount in rent and rates was charged. This was considered to be unfair especially when for some goods there might be direct competition with a shopkeeper paying full rent and rates. However, for various reasons, landlords were willing to let shops, on a short-term basis, for use as charity shops.

6. WORKING WITH YOU - TOPICS RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILLORS

Councillor Bills raised an issue regarding an apparent difference in approach between the Council's Enforcement Officers and Police Officers on the parking of vehicles on a pavement where there was sufficient room for a double buggy to pass by. In the instances mentioned, the Enforcement Officer had issued a parking ticket, whereas it was indicated that a Police Officer would not have taken action.

Sergeant Hall, West Midlands Police, was in attendance and reported that attitudes to such incidents had changed and that West Midlands Police were inclined to take a common sense approach to the problem. However, without seeing photographs of the vehicles in question, it was hard to comment. There was a need therefore for the Police to discuss the matter with the Council's Enforcement Officers. The Lead Officer would also arrange for the matter to be investigated with particular reference to the issue of whether the cars were parked on or near double yellow lines.

Following the comments made, Sergeant Hall was invited to comment on crime generally in the area and in so doing reported that the level of crime in Halesowen was dropping, although a small seasonal increase was expected. However, overall there were no areas of concern.

7. AREA GRANTS

A report of the Lead Officer was submitted on three applications for funding. Two of the applications had previously been refused, however, the applicants had requested that their applications be reconsidered.

It was further noted that following the division of wards in the Halesowen area into two Community Forums, these applications would also be receiving consideration at the forthcoming meeting of the Belle Vale/Hayley Green and Cradley South Community Forum.

AGREED to recommend -

- (1) That the Director of Corporate Resources again notify the following applicants that their applications had been refused:-
 - (a) Halesowen British Legion;
 - (b) St. Margaret's Well Surgery Patients Panel.
- (2) That the Director of Corporate Resources approve the making of a grant of £2,100 to Halesowen and Rowley Regis Rotary Club, being half of the total funding requested, towards the total cost of highway closures and diversions in relation to the annual fun run and charity race organised by the group for 22nd September, 2013.

8. DATE, TIME AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted, that the next meeting of the Community Forum would be held at 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 4th September, 2013 in the Cornbow Hall, Halesowen.

Arising from this, it was considered that to aid publicity for future meetings of the Forum details of venues be included on future agendas and it was further noted that a database was currently being developed whereby people who wished their details to be included on the database would be sent regular e-mails notifying them of events such as future Council meetings.

The meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.