

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Monday, 12th September, 2005 at 7.00 pm
at Stourbridge Town Hall, Crown Centre, Stourbridge

PRESENT:-

Councillor Adams (Chairman)
Councillors Banks, Mrs Collins, Mrs Cowell, Donegan, Jones, Kettle, Knowles, Mrs Martin, Musk, Rogers, A Turner, Vickers and C Wilson; Mr D Coggan, Mr G Downing and Mr P Singh.

Officers:-

Director of Law and Property (as Area Liaison Officer); Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Development and Environmental Protection) Project Manager - Traffic, Senior Engineer - Traffic (Directorate of the Urban Environment); Assistant Director of Education (Access and Inclusion Division) Area Youth and Community Worker (Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning); Area Manager, Stourbridge District Housing Office (Directorate of Housing) and Mrs. J. Rees (Directorate of Law and Property).

IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Superintendent N Dickerson and Inspector M Thomas, together with approximately 80 members of the public were in attendance at the meeting.

21

MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20th June 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the following amendments:-

- 1) In Minute No. 13 (2), that the name of Councillor Mrs Collins to be added to the composition of the Stourbridge Town Centre Traffic Management Working Group.
- 2) In Minute 19 a), that the words "and won a gold medal" be added to the last line.

22

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Adams declared a prejudicial and personal interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item number 8, in view of his being Honorary President of the Friends of Mary Stevens Park.

Councillor Rogers declared a prejudicial and personal interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of agenda item no. 8, in view of his being Vice Chairman of the Friends of Mary Stevens Park.

23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillor Attwood; Miss R Hill and Ms P Shepherd.

24 RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

The following petition was submitted by the persons indicated and submitted to the appropriate officer for attention:-

From residents of the Murcroft Road and Dobbins Oak Road area, supporting the closure of the footpath between Murcroft Road and Dobbins Oak Road. This was dealt with under agenda item no. 11 and referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for investigation and a written response to be sent to the first signatory on the petition.

25 PUBLIC FORUM

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

Questions and answers were then given as follows: -

1. A number of questions and issues were raised by members of the public, all relating to the reported closure of Beauty Bank Primary School. Concerns included:
 - the fact that other schools within the vicinity were already over subscribed;
 - possible job losses;
 - loss of a school which received an excellent OFSTED report; whether children from same families would be able to obtain places in same schools;
 - would the school be vandalised;
 - concerns for special needs children,
 - safety for children having to travelling further afield; and
 - the possibility that the building was being considered as part of the redevelopment of the Enville Street area.

The Acting Assistant Director of Education (Access and Inclusion) responded, advising that consultation on proposed school closures was due to commence, and would continue for two months. All comments made would be considered, together with any further comments made, at the proposed consultation meetings, before any final decisions were made on which schools would close.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning also responded, stating that there was spare capacity in primary schools, owing to falling numbers. The matter needed to be addressed to ensure all children had a good education and that resources were maximised. No firm decision as to which schools would close would be made until the end of the consultation period. If the decision was to close a particular school, staff would be offered posts at alternative schools, if they wished. Parents would be offered alternative schools within close proximity to their home, should places be available.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration advised that the school had not been identified for closure as part of the redevelopment plans for Enville Street area, and closure would only be based on falling numbers.

Persons attending for this item were advised that a public consultation meeting was scheduled for 6th October 2005, at which officers would be in attendance to give information and advice and answer any pertinent questions.

2. A query was raised by a local resident in respect of recent new legislation regarding responsibility for electrical repairs and concerns that his house insurance would be invalidated on account of his property not having been electrically checked for over 10 years. The Area Housing Manager for Stourbridge advised that the legislation was not retrospective, and confirmed that the questioner's insurance would not be affected. She undertook to send a written response to the questioner, who was unable to attend the meeting.
3. Comments regarding High Hedges legislation were deferred for consideration under agenda item no. 9.
4. In response to a query regarding when plastic items would be included in the Council's recycling collections, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Development and Environmental Protection) advised that whilst the rollout of recycling within the Borough was almost complete, there were no plans to include plastic until a research project into the feasibility of recycling plastic was completed and the findings known.

5. Members of the Friends of Wollescote Park and Mary Stevens Park commented on the recent achievement of Stourbridge Town in attaining the Silver Award in the recent national Towns in Bloom competition. They asked for recognition for the support given to the town by the local community, businesses and schools. Members of the Committee applauded the support which had been given and the colour which the project had brought to the Town. Everyone was encouraged to take part in next year's competition.

 6. Concern was expressed regarding funding previously allocated to Pedmore Fields Tenants Association, towards the building of a community centre, which had not yet been built, and as to what would happen to these funds, in the event of no building taking place.

A representative, of the Pedmore Fields Tenants Association, advised that the sum granted was to be used specifically for drainage to the land, in Wollescote Park. The Community Centre had not been built, as the Association had failed to attract the necessary funding from the Lottery Fund. The allocation remained in a bank account and work on the drainage of the land would commence in Winter 2005. Local Authority staff would oversee the funds to ensure that they were appropriately used.

 7. In response to a further query as to who was responsible for ensuring that capital allocations from the committee were not wasted, the Area Liaison Officer advised that he, As Director of Law and Property, the Area Committee, the Council's own Audit Committee and Finance Officers would ensure that funds were spent appropriately.

 8. A member of the public, unable to attend the meeting, raised concerns that only part of the requested maintenance work had been carried out in the Withymoor Area by the Ground Maintenance Section. Some of the grass verges on the sides of the footpath connecting Ashton Park to the National Cycle way had not been cut throughout the Spring or Summer, but they were not the responsibility of the Grounds Maintenance Section. In response, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Development and Environmental Protection) advised that she would investigate the concerns. She was aware that some of the areas referred to were not within the ownership of the Council, and therefore undertook to write to the appropriate landowners and send a written response to the questioner.

 9. In response to a query regarding the one way system at the Stourbridge Cemetery, the Chairman advised that a report on the Cemetery was due to be submitted to the November meeting of the Committee.
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YOUTH ISSUES

There were no youth issues to be discussed at this meeting.

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POLICING ISSUES

Chief Superintendent Dickerson gave an oral presentation on the successful police work carried out to help to decrease crime figures in the last twelve months. Crime figures for Dudley, and especially the Stourbridge area had seen a marked decrease over last year's figures. He advised on meetings of the Police consultative meeting, the next of which was scheduled for Thursday 15th September at Redhill School, Junction Road, Stourbridge, and invited anyone with a police issue to attend to express their views. He also encouraged members of the public to contact him directly if they were concerned about a lack of police presence in their area.

In response to a query from a member of the public, Chief Superintendent Dickerson advised that the Police force was currently in the process of recruiting new staff.

A review which was due to take place on the police use of special constables, and people were encouraged to submit their views on this matter.

RESOLVED

That Chief Superintendent Dickinson be thanked for his presentation, the contents of which be noted.

28

APPLICATIONS IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted in respect of land and property owned by the Council.

On consideration of the report submitted and comments made thereon it was

RESOLVED

- (1) That consideration of the application for a joint sale of the surplus land fronting Enville Street, Stourbridge, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, be deferred to enable Members of the Committee to undertake a site visit.

- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be advised to approve the application for a lease of the land at the Friends Meeting House (Stourbridge Quakers Religious Society of Friends) Scotts Road, Stourbridge, as shown hatched on the plan attached to the report submitted, on terms and conditions to be negotiated and approved by the Director of Law and Property.

29

CAPITAL ALLOCATIONS

(Having previously declared a prejudicial interest in parts of this item, Councillors Adams and Rogers withdrew from the meeting during consideration of their respective applications).

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on three applications for capital funding from the Committee's Capital Allocations budget.

Members of the Committee expressed concern regarding the allocating of monies to the Enville Street and Stepping Stones Group for equipment, in the light of the consultation due to take place regarding possible closure of the Beauty Bank Primary School.

Upon consideration of the report and comments made thereon, it was

RESOLVED

1. That consideration of the application by the Enville Street and Stepping Stones Group be deferred until a decision has been made regarding the possible closure of Beauty Bank Primary School.
2. That the sums referred to below be allocated to the following organisations for the purposes indicated.

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Friends of Mary Stevens Park	A playground extension at Mary Stevens Park to incorporate play equipment	£5000
The What? Centre, Stourbridge	Electrical work at the Centre	£1539

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HIGH HEDGES LEGISLATION

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the background and implementation of the High Hedges legislation and the process of dealing with complaints.

Where neighbours could agree a solution The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 (Part 8) gave local authorities powers to deal with complaints about high hedges in a role as an impartial third party. The Council however, could only consider a complaint if certain criteria were satisfied and a flowchart of the procedure of whether or not to proceed with a complaint was attached as Appendix 1. It was also noted that a fee of £405, reduced for the first three months of operation to £300, to allow the true cost of delivering the service to be measured would be charged.

In response to queries raised by members of the public, in the Public Forum Session, as to the height that high hedges could reasonably be cut back to, and the high cost of the “fee” charged, the Area Liaison Officer advised that a minimum of 2 metres would be deemed as a sensible height.

The Assistant Director Development and Environment Protection responded to a query raised by a Member of the Committee as to whether a reduced “fee” was charged for people with low incomes or people on pensions, and advised that the Council reserved the right to negotiate the fee in cases of hardship. It was also commented that there was a lot of administrative work to be undertaken regarding the legislation, which was reflected in the charge.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report submitted and comments made thereon be noted.

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STOPPING UP OF PART OF A PUBLIC PATH ACROSS THE RIDGE
PRIMARY SCHOOL, GREGORY ROAD, WOLLASTON

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted seeking support to limit the use of a public footpath at the Ridge Primary school, Wollaston.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the proposal be supported and that the Cabinet Member for Transportation be advised of the Committee’s support for the introduction of an Order to close of the length of public footpath, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, under Section 118b(1)(b) of the Highways Act 1980 and to rededicate the footpath under Section 25 of the Highways Act 1980 subject to the restrictions that it shall remain closed during school opening periods in the interests of the safety of the staff but shall be open to the public at all other times.
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APPLICATION TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CRIME PREVENTION IN (DESIGNATED AREAS) ORDERS PATHS OFF MURCROFT ROAD, PEDMORE AND HAYES LANE, LYE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted seeking support for an application to be made to the Secretary of State for a Crime Prevention (Designated Areas) Order based on the areas referred to in the plans attached to the report submitted.

A petition of 117 signatures was submitted in support of the proposed closure of the footpaths between Murcroft Road and Dobbins Oak Road and Murcroft Road and Wychbury Road.

A member of the public expressed concerns at the volume of acts of anti social behaviour on the footpaths, all of which had been reported to the police.

A member of the public commented on the similarities between the proposed closures under consideration and the request previously made for the closure of Ballarat Walk, Stourbridge. In response, the Senior Engineer, Traffic advised that following further discussion with the Police regarding Ballarat Walk, it had been concluded that Ballarat Walk did not fulfil the criteria for consideration for closure.

Following consideration of the reports and the comments made thereon, it was

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be advised of the Committee's support for the applications to the Secretary of State for Crime Prevention (Designated Areas) Order for the areas shown on the plans attached to the report submitted, namely Murcroft Road and The Hayes, Stourbridge, for the reasons set out in the report.

SCHOOL KEEP CLEAR MARKINGS TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER (3) 2005

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted seeking support for the third proposed Traffic Regulation Order for the School Keep Clear markings for the current year for locations within the area of the Committee, as shown in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be advised of the Committee's support for the provision of a Traffic Regulation Order to prohibit stopping on school entrance markings at the locations shown in Appendix 1 to the report submitted.

34

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on written responses made to questions asked at previous meetings.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

35

ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillor Adams raised:-

a) Bus Stop on the bend near Providence Street, Lye By-Pass

At a previous meeting of the Committee, Councillor Turner had expressed concern that emergency services' vehicles could not overtake buses when stopped at the bus stop near the bend on Providence Street, Lye. The matter had been referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for consideration who, prior to the meeting, had advised Councillor Adams that the kerb on the bend of Providence Street was scheduled for re-alignment in the very near future and that this would allow overtaking of busses parked at the bus stop to take place safely.

b) Cycle Facilities at Mary Stevens Park

A request had been made for a bicycle shelter for employees at Mary Stevens Park. A plan of the site for the shelter was on display for information.

The Friends of Mary Stevens Park had indicated they would also like provision of a bicycle shelter for the public within Mary Stevens Park, close to the playground

RESOLVED

That the Director of the Urban Environment be advised of the Committee's support for the installation of a cycle shelter at Mary Stevens Park for employees' cycles and also for a similar provision in close proximity to the playground at Mary Stevens Park.

Councillor Kettle raised:-

a) Concern at the large number of cars parking inconsiderately on Birmingham Street, backing up to the Stepping Stones. The Senior Engineer – Traffic undertook to investigate the concerns and send a written response to Councillor Kettle.

b) Concern that Kwik Save Supermarket had blocked off the pavement in High Street Stourbridge with scaffolding and hoarding during refurbishment of the store. The Senior Engineer, Traffic undertook to investigate and send a written response to Councillor Kettle.

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DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS.

The dates and venues of future meetings were reported as follows:-

14th November, 2005 at 7.00pm at Redhill School, Junction Road, Stourbridge

13th January, 2006 at 7.00pm at Hob Green Primary School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge

20th March 2006, at 7.00pm at Hob Green School, Hob Green Road, Stourbridge

The meeting ended at 8.35pm.

CHAIRMAN