

**SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND**  
**ADULT EDUCATION**

Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008, at 6.00 pm  
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

**PRESENT:-**

Councillor C Wilson (Chairman)  
Councillor Mottram (Vice Chairman)  
Councillors D Blood, Hanif, Lowe, Stanley, K Turner, Vickers and Woodall

**Officers**

Assistant Director Housing Strategy and Private Sector (Lead Officer to the Committee), Director of Law and Property, Senior Assistant Director of Finance (Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement), Head of Museums, Green Spaces and Bereavement Services, Head of Economic Regeneration Delivery and Justin Haywood Economic Regeneration (Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law and Property)

Six members of the public were also in attendance

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12      **FORMER COUNCILLOR TERRY POWELL**

The Chairman referred to the recent death of former Councillor Terry Powell, who had served on the Council for some eight years as a Ward Member for the Pedmore and Stourbridge East Ward and was the first Chairman of the forerunner to this Committee, the Select Committee on Economic Vitality and Jobs.

All present stood in silent tribute to his memory.

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13      **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

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

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14      **SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was reported that Councillors Vickers and Hanif had been appointed as substitute Members for Councillors Barlow and Roberts respectively for this meeting of the Committee only.

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15            DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Woodall declared a personal interest in Agenda item 7 – the Leasowes Restoration project – in that he was a member of the Friends of Leasowes.

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16            MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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17            PUBLIC FORUM

Arising from queries made, the Lead Officer reported that he had made arrangements for the circulation of the desktop assessment report from Birmingham Archaeology on the Mount Pleasant school site, referred to at the last meeting of the Committee, to be circulated to all Members of the Committee. If this had not in fact been done, he would ensure that copies of the report were circulated before the next meeting of this Committee.

As part of this item, Members queried the arrangements for the future operation of the Public Forum agenda item. One suggestion made was that it be time-limited whilst another was that members of the public, should they wish to raise an item, be given every opportunity to do so.

The Chairman indicated that, as on previous occasions, he considered that members of the public who wished to raise an item under the Public Forum agenda item of the Committee, should be given every opportunity to do so.

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18            ANNUAL REVIEW OF EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY 2008

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted on the Annual review of equality and diversity for 2008, a copy of which was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

The Director of Law and Property, in his presentation of the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted highlighted in particular the three priorities for the next twelve months as set out in paragraph 11.5 of the Annual review:-

- developing and implementing action plans for:-

- further access improvements to public buildings, and,
- increasing the number of employees with a disability
- updating the Council's vision for delivering equality, and
- ensuring that equality impact assessments are completed.

Following the presentation given, Members made a number of comments, referring in particular to the percentage of employees with a disability, which was below that of top quartile authorities; the decrease in the number of racial incidents involving the Authority in 2007/08 and the possible explanations for this; a query regarding appointments, in response to which an assurance was given that appointments were made on no other basis than that of merit; the position whereby women were under-represented in posts at salary point 34 and above (Principal Officer and above) although there were indications that the Authority was seeking to address this through training and the point made that year on year the Authority was getting better at reducing inequalities.

In response to a further query from a Member regarding the provision of a rail for use by disabled people on the steps at the front of the Council House, Dudley, it was reported that provision of such a rail was in the work programme for works to be carried out.

#### RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, Appendix to the report and as reported at the meeting, on the Annual review of equality and diversity 2008, be received and noted and that the report be referred to the Cabinet for approval.

#### 19 THE LEASOWES RESTORATION PROJECT – AN INVESTIGATION

A report of the Lead Officer was submitted on the background to the lengthy period of time taken to initiate on-site development of the Leasowes Restoration works; the increase in budget for the scheme; the balance between fees and restoration work and the identification of any lessons for the project management of any future complex projects.

In addition to the report submitted, a copy of a plan entitled 'The Leasowes Restoration – Phase I' was circulated at the meeting indicating in particular, the Beechwater Dam, entrance improvements and Virgil's Grove.

The Lead Officer, in his presentation of the report, gave a brief overview of its three parts as set out in paragraph 2 of the report. He also thanked the Officers concerned for making all file documents available to him and for their dedication to the project. In essence, it was considered that of the period from 1997 to date, approximately one and a half year's delay could be attributed to the Council. The project needed Section 106 funding that had now become available which would now enable the project to be completed before December 2008. The balance between consultancy costs and works costs had not been challenged by the Heritage Lottery Fund and reflected the complexity of the project.

Following the presentation given, the Chairman gave the members of the public present, representing Friends of Leasowes Park, the opportunity to comment and in so doing Miss Diller, the Chairman of the Friends, and her colleagues commented in particular on the following aspects:-

- In raising their concerns they wished to make it clear that they had not staged a vendetta against the people managing the project.
- There was a need to ensure that future projects of similar complexity were managed more appropriately.
- That the delays incurred had had a detrimental effect on the remainder of Leasowes Park
- That the findings of the report were accepted.
- That lessons must be learnt and applied when dealing with future projects.
- The need for improved project management, for example, the introduction of a management plan at a more appropriate time and tackling works other than in the sequential way undertaken with this project.
- The need to engage with users of the park so that their vision can be considered.
- The need to acknowledge and deal with public perceptions of projects of this nature.
- The need to be realistic when preparing and submitting bids for funding.

In responding to the various points made, the criticism regarding the management plan was accepted but it was noted that regard must be had to the brief referred to this committee by Halesowen Area Committee and the concerns they expressed. It was also the case that the Council needed to work closely with the Heritage Lottery Fund who have provided most of the available funding and, as the report indicated, there had been difficulties with that relationship in the early stages of the project. Again, as indicated in the report, whilst some of the delay could be attributed to the Council, the rest was as a result of working with the other agencies involved and therefore, the Council could not be held responsible for the whole of the delay for the period concerned. Similarly, there were issues regarding the funding of the project, which with hindsight, required a higher level of funding.

In responding to points raised, Officers from the Directorate of the Urban Environment involved in the project reported that lessons had been learnt arising from this project, not only by the Council but also by the Heritage Lottery Fund with the acknowledged need for a good collaborative approach and shared working.

Members then made a number of comments and asked questions relating, in particular, to the balance between fees and works undertaken and, following consideration of the various details given for the amounts and works quoted, it was reported that with the inclusion of the Section 106 monies, the balance between fees and works was approximately 50% for each category. It was also reported that works in connection with grounds maintenance and wardens services were being paid for by the Council in any event. It was acknowledged that the level of fees was high but that this was a complex project.

Regarding the issue of the use of Section 106 monies, in response to a query raised, it was reported that approximately £350,000 remained of such monies for use in the Halesowen area.

Further comments were made regarding the valuable role undertaken by the Friends of Leasowes Park, not only concerning the project but in continuing to raise the matter at appropriate venues, such as Halesowen Area Committee. Emphasis was placed on the importance of learning lessons. Again the issue of perceptions was raised in that, given the balance between fees and works recorded, questions were raised in relation to value for money.

Regarding the management of the project, it was acknowledged that from 2001 this was of a far more robust nature. However, there was a need for guidance to be issued based on the lessons of this project and the need to have a broad partnership approach to dispel the perceptions as indicated at the meeting. The hope was also expressed that future work, not only in this project but similar projects, would involve a total partnership with relevant community groups in the area involved so that good lines of communication were established and maintained. Such improvements would go a long way to ensuring that similar difficulties were not experienced again and would be better overcome.

The comments made regarding the need to keep groups such as The Friends of the Park informed about what was happening were reiterated and it was considered that the project was now on the right lines for completion in the relatively near future. It was further considered that lessons had been learnt and experience gained so that mistakes made would not be repeated.

In response to a suggestion made, it was agreed that arrangements be made for the Committee to have a site visit to the project.

In response to a query regarding the role of the Historic Landscape Consultant, it was reported that the fees charged over an eleven year period bought advice in a very specialised area in which only a small number of people in the country were able to advise on. The role encompassed not only the historic aspects but also how to fit those in with considerations of modern engineering.

Regarding bids for funding, it was reported that money, in particular from the European Regional Development Fund, might be available if bid for, although the closing date was imminent.

At the conclusion of questions and comments, Friends of Leasowes Park were given a final opportunity to comment and in so doing thanked the Committee for the opportunity to express their views and listen to the comments made. The Lead Officer was also thanked for the report submitted.

The Chairman, in concluding this item, referred to the concluding remarks contained in the report submitted, in particular those stating that “as a Council, we should be pleased and indeed proud that there are a wide range of stakeholders including staff but particularly the Friends of Leasowes who have stayed the course in very trying adverse circumstances and ultimately will ensure the finish of a scheme which protects and enhances ‘a local treasure of national and international significance in the Borough’.”

RESOLVED

1. That the Lead Officer be requested to submit a report, on behalf of the Committee, to a forthcoming meeting of the Cabinet, arising from the consideration given to the report submitted on the investigation into the Leasowes Restoration Project, recommending that arrangements be made to review the Council's present project management arrangements, taking on board any lessons learnt from The Leasowes Project and others taking place since the revised corporate project management arrangements were put in place in 2003/2004.
2. That arrangements be made for a site visit by Members of the Committee to Leasowes Park to view the Phase I improvements of the Leasowes Restoration Project.

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SOUTH BLACK COUNTRY ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION CENTRE

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the progress made in developing the South Black Country Enterprise and Innovation Centre proposal.

The Economic Regeneration Officer, in his presentation of the report, commented on the various points raised during consideration of which, a suggestion was made that a representative of this Committee might be included with those persons attending the UK Business Incubation Conference to be held later this year. The Economic Regeneration Officer undertook to pursue the matter.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, and as reported at the meeting, on the progress made to further the development of the South Black Country Enterprise and Innovation Centre, be noted.

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REPORT ON THE VISITOR ECONOMY

It was noted that this matter had been withdrawn from consideration at this meeting of the Committee for consideration at a meeting on a future date.

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QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on performance in the fourth quarter of 2007/08, January to March 2008, in relation to the activities relating to the Terms of Reference of the Committee.

Arising from the consideration of the content of the report summary, circulated with the report submitted, Members made a number of comments relating in particular to:-

- The reducing percentage of minor planning applications determined within eight weeks with the hope that the issues giving rise to this were being addressed.
- The possible use of European monies in relation to the Wrens Nest and Seven Sisters Visitor experience and the Stepshaft Mine project.
- Issues relating to the delay to the Metro and associated issues to do with Congestion Charging. The view was also expressed that future developments should involve a heavy rail option which would better assist regeneration in the Borough.
- The issue of cost arising from the percentage of appeals allowed against the Authority's decision to refuse on planning grounds.
- Clarification as to whether Performance Indicator HCOP05.1a/ - relating to the percentage of the population 20 minutes travel time (walking) from a range of three different sports facility types, one of which has achieved a Quality Assurance Standard, related to Council provision or private provision and the question previously raised regarding the need for a consistent approach in opening hours of facilities, which it was requested be considered as part of the report on Leisure Centre Investment Update, to include community usage of Leisure Centres, to be submitted to the meeting of the Committee in January, 2009.
- Concerns raised about the number of flats, as opposed to houses, being built in the Borough and the perceived detrimental impact this had in attracting and encouraging people to live in the Borough, impacting adversely in related economic benefits.
- Concerns about the current system of planning control leading to decisions made at a local level being overturned by the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol.
- That there was a need for the Member/ Officer relationship in respect of planning applications to be developed so that all views could be taken into account.
- Possible use of incentives to Developers to provide homes, possibly involving Section 106 monies.

RESOLVED



1. That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on performance in the fourth quarter of 2007/08, January to March 2008, in relation to the activities relating to the Terms of Reference of this Committee, be noted.
2. That the Lead Officer be requested to arrange for the comments made by Members on the planning and leisure issues raised in connection with this matter to be conveyed to the Officers concerned so that they can be considered and responded to in reports to be submitted to the next and future meetings of this Committee.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm

CHAIRMAN