

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 11 March, 2009 at 6.00 p.m.
at Lutley Community Centre, Brookwillow Road, Halesowen

PRESENT:-

Councillor Mrs Faulkner (Chairman)
Councillor James (Vice Chairman)
Councillors Crumpton, Mrs Dunn, Hill, Ms Nicholls, Ms Partridge, Mrs Shakespeare, Taylor, K Turner, Mrs Turner, Vickers and Woodall

Officers

The Director of Finance (as Area Liaison Officer), Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services (Early Years, Youth and Education Services) The Head of Executive Support and the Group Engineer (Transportation) (both Directorate of the Urban Environment), the Area Community Renewal Officer for Halesowen, the Area Youth Team Leader for Halesowen (Directorate of Children's Services), the Interim Assistant Director of Law and Property (Legal and Democratic Services) and Mr Sanders (Directorate of Law and Property)

Also in Attendance

Inspector H Khathar (West Midlands Police) and 14 members of the public.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Body and Burston.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Crumpton declared a personal and prejudicial interest in item number 10 on the agenda (Delegated Capital Budget) in so far as it related to Cradley Community Welfare Association in view of his trusteeship of the Association.

Councillor K Turner declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item number 6 on the agenda (Police and Emergency Services Issues) in relation to any fire service matters that might be raised in view of his membership of the West Midlands Fire Authority.

Councillor K Turner declared a personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item number 16 on the agenda (Community Renewal Working Group) in view of his capacity as a Director of Groundwork Black Country and a member of the Caslon Community Partnership.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22nd January, 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the amendment of minute number 67 (ii) to state that Councillor Mrs Faulkner lives in close proximity to the area of the proposed Traffic Regulation Order, rather than that she parks her car in Whittingham Road, and of minute 69 to refer to the name of Lucy Taylor rather than Lucy Barton.

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PETITIONS

The receipt of a petition from residents of Highfields, Halesowen requesting action to be taken to alleviate poor quality of houses on the Highfields Estate, because of a lack of central heating, double glazing and insulation, was reported. It was also reported that the petition had been referred to the Principal Housing Manager for Halesowen for attention.

In noting the receipt of the petition, Councillor James indicated his support for the petitioners.

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YOUTH ISSUES

Dominic Tipping, Area Team Leader – Halesowen and Cradley Area Youth Team in the Directorate of Children's Services, reported orally on current issues relating to the team and activities undertaken, including the following:-

- That Halesowen Youth Centre was a full time hub and would be increasing the night youth sessions accommodated there from three to four in number weekly, seeking to commence in April/May 2009.
- That part time Practitioners for Youth Work sessions had been appointed both within the detached and centre based service.
- That joint working with the Stourbridge Area Youth Team had been conducted within the Foxcote area and thus between three to four youth sessions weekly would be implemented.

- That Greenhill Youth Centre was a part time hub and would be increasing the night work sessions accommodated there from three to four in number weekly and would be looking at disabled youth provision, as provided for within the Youth Service Youth Offer.
- That the Area Youth Forum was now in being with members from various voluntary and statutory agencies within the Halesowen and Cradley Area.
- That future work with other agencies was to be implemented around youth provision.

RESOLVED

That the oral report now given by the Area Team Leader be received and noted.

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POLICE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES ISSUES

(a) Police Issues

Inspector Khathar attended the meeting and reported on a number of issues, including the following:

- (i) In response to a written question submitted by a member of the public asking what action was being taken to reduce graffiti in Halesowen Town Centre, how many people who could have been responsible for individual acts of graffiti had been identified in the past year and what action, if any, had resulted, Inspector Khathar indicated that when reports of damage or graffiti were reported to the Police, they were investigated. There had been a spate in the last part of 2008. One person had been arrested and cautioned. In relation to the question on the number of people responsible for graffiti, who had been identified in the past year, Inspector Khathar did not have the statistical information available with her. The member of the public who raised the issue asked further how the Pool Road car park came to be covered in graffiti, when it was situated virtually opposite to the Police Station. In response, Inspector Khathar stated that Police Officers were not located at the Police Station all the time and thus were not always able to see when graffiti was being perpetrated.

Inspector Khathar expressed the view that there had been a significant reduction in acts of graffiti over the last year.

- (ii) Inspector Khathar indicated that Police and Communities Together meetings were to be held monthly in every neighbourhood and that prior notice would be given on the Police website. The Police were continuing to work with elected members in partnership.
- (iii) Reporting on a meeting the previous day, Councillor K Turner expressed his appreciation of the undertaking given by the Police that action would be taken regarding speeding traffic in the Huntingtree Road/Dunstall Road area.
- (iv) In noting the information regarding the monthly Police and Communities Together meetings, Councillors K Turner and Crumpton drew attention to a possible overlap of meetings. A suggestion was made that it might be preferable for arrangements to be made for meetings to be held on a two monthly basis. In response, Inspector Khathar acknowledged the need for Police and Communities Together meetings to be representative of all communities but expressed the view that the new structure should be implemented as proposed and reviewed later, if necessary. She also made the point that there would be the opportunity for partners to engage at strategic level.

(b) Fire Issues

No fire issues were raised. No representatives of the West Midlands Fire Service were in attendance.

- (a) The issue of there being no public footpath along the Queensway dual carriageway from the pelican crossing at Summerhill to the junction of Pool Road was raised by a member of the public as a health and safety and road safety issue. The member of the public made the point that pedestrians were either walking in the highway or on top of a steep embankment, which also had an unprotected edge of a drop of approximately 11 feet at the subway portal.

The member of the public indicated that he had not been satisfied with an oral reply received in raising the matter that the cost of constructing a footpath would be prohibitive.

In response, the Group Engineer (Transportation) stated that the problem had been exacerbated at the time the temporary bus station had been in place. The provision of a permanent footpath at the top of the bank had been investigated but, currently, this could not be undertaken owing to a lack of resources. Work to alleviate the situation, however, would be proceeded with in due course.

The Group Engineer indicated the efforts that had been made to dissuade the public from using the route but accepted that these had not been altogether successful. The issues of risk had been discussed and it had been decided to fence off the drop and to provide signage. The member of the public who raised the issue doubted whether the action proposed would resolve the issue.

- (b) In response to a question asked on why the front and rear to the new Asda Superstore was coloured blue, and not the corporate Asda colour of green, the member of the public who raised the issue was advised to take up the matter with Asda.
- (c) A question was asked by a member of the public on why the crossing lights at the bus station did not have a bleeping facility. The Group Engineer (Transportation) indicated that there were two other pelican crossings in close proximity to the bus station and to have accommodated a bleeping mechanism at that location would have caused confusion to visually impaired people.
- (d) A complainant to the Local Government Ombudsman on the issue of the closure of the Cradley Leisure Centre referred to the findings of the Ombudsman in that regard. It was agreed that the Ombudsman's letter and the response to the Council thereto be circulated to members of the Committee.
- (e) A member of the public who had raised the issue previously complained again of the action of the Council in closing Cradley High School, in the context of 'Every Child Matters'. She considered it unsatisfactory that pupils from the Cradley area had to travel to other schools for their secondary education, including Pedmore College of Technology, and referred to the difficulty those children had in undertaking after school activities. It was agreed that the issue of their secondary education be referred to the Directorate of Children's Services for a written reply.
- (f) A question was asked by a member of the public on the reasons why an area of Homer Hill Park had been removed and no longer fell within the park boundary. It was agreed that a written response would be sent to the member of the public and that the Committee would be copied into the response.
- (g) A question was asked by a member of the public regarding the current position in respect of a footpath from Leasowes to Ladypool Close and West Dean Close.

A detailed response was given by the Head of Executive Support in the Directorate of the Urban Environment, in which the following information was given.

The footpath in question ran along the south side of the disused canal and provided access to both Ladypool Close and West Dean Close. Concerns had been raised by local people about the deteriorating condition of the route with specific regard to its underfoot condition and the condition and stability of the bank above and below the route.

Following these concerns a site meeting had been held in December 2007. It had been agreed that the path should be closed, while alternative solutions could be investigated and costed. It had been confirmed subsequently that the path was not a Definitive Public Right of Way.

Accordingly, the wardens had erected temporary fencing in order to close the path and had maintained the fencing to the best of their abilities. However, walkers had continued to use the path and the fencing had been broken down almost on a daily basis.

Three options had been explored and it had been decided to proceed with that which would provide for the closure of the length of path running across the embankment and the creation of a diversion which would take walkers across the existing earth bund, at the Narrows, and then back across a new earth bund about 100 metres to the east and back along the existing paths.

Following further complaints from walkers about the poor condition of the path and a number of reported accidents, a further site meeting had been held on 10 December 2008. At the meeting concerns had been raised not only about the condition of the path, but also the deteriorating condition of the bank which could ultimately affect adjacent properties should the situation deteriorate further.

Concerns had also been expressed about the vulnerability of the trees to wind blow which, should this occur, would accelerate the bank erosion. It was agreed, therefore, that as part of the works a number of the trees on the embankment should be cut down to ground level and managed as coppice, thus mitigating the likelihood of the trees being blown over at the same time as retaining the root stabilisation of the bank.

In consequence, it had been agreed to try and secure the funding of an estimated £15,000 necessary to implement the work described above. As this would involve the construction of an earth bund across the canal it was agreed to discuss the proposals with the Lapal Canal Trust. At a meeting on 27th February, 2009, Trust representatives had given their support to the proposed work. The Dudley Local Access Forum had been apprised of the situation. The proposals would be submitted to the Area Committee for consultation in due course.

At the conclusion of consideration of this issue, a suggestion was made by Councillor Crumpton that a representative of the Dudley Local Access Forum be invited to attend the Committee for a discussion about footpaths.

WARD ISSUES

- (a) Councillor K Turner referred again to the use of Huntingtree Road as a rat run and suggested the siting of a speed indicator board might be appropriate.
- (b) Councillor K Turner drew attention to traffic congestion at the junction of Meadow Road and Brookwillow Road. He also asked when double yellow lines at Brookwillow Road would be installed.

In response, the Group Engineer (Transportation) indicated that within the next twelve months the Brookwillow Road/Meadow Brook Road/Huntingtree Road area would be considered for Traffic Regulation Orders. The Group Engineer also agreed to refer the issue of speed indicator boards at Huntingtree Road to the Road Safety Officer for consideration.

- (c) Councillor Vickers drew attention to the instigation of the 007 bus service that would be operated by Diamond Travel from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm on the Halesmere Estate but urged residents to use the service, as it was likely to be withdrawn if usage was low.
- (d) Councillor Crumpton again expressed his disagreement with the use of monies from the Mary Stevens Trust for repairs to the gates at Mary Stevens Park. In response, the Area Liaison Officer indicated that he had written to Councillor Crumpton, providing him with a full response, in which it had been confirmed that the allocation of the funds from the Trust for the purpose of the gates was entirely in accordance with the trust deed. The Area Liaison Officer then specified the four matters under the trust scheme on which funds could be deployed and confirmed again that these covered the restoration of the gates at Mary Stevens Park.

Councillor Crumpton asked for the view of the Labour members of the Committee that the use of trust monies for the purpose of the repair of the gates was not appropriate to be recorded.

- (e) Councillor Ms Partridge drew attention to fly tipping taking place in the area of Foxcote Lane, Wynall Lane and Wynall Lane South and requested that enforcement measures be instigated. She pointed out that it was not always local people who were causing the problem. Councillor Mrs Shakespeare, in her capacity as Cabinet Member for the Environment and Culture, encouraged anyone who had information regarding persons who fly tipped to notify Enforcement Officers who would then prosecute.

A suggestion was made by one member that notices indicating that the Council would prosecute might act as a deterrent to potential fly tippers.

- (f) Attention was drawn by Councillor Ms Partridge to the removal of a traffic visor situated at Oldnall Road. The Group Engineer (Transportation) confirmed that the Council was aware that the installation had been vandalised and indicated that the purchase of new equipment was awaited.

Regarding speeding vehicles, the Group Engineer indicated that there had been some evidence of a reduction of vehicular speed and stated that, as soon as the new equipment had been purchased and installed, the area would be resurveyed.

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RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE HALESOWEN AREA_
COMMITTEE HELD ON 22ND JANUARY 2009

RESOLVED

That the report and the information contained therein, be noted.

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DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

(Having declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item, Councillor Crumpton left the room during consideration of the item)

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted seeking consideration of applications for grants from the Capital Budget Allocation of the Committee, and matters associated therewith.

In relation to the application by the Cradley Community Welfare Association, the Area Liaison Officer indicated that the level of grant requested had been misinterpreted in the report and the sum requested was, in fact, £2000, rather than £500. The Area Liaison Officer also referred to a number of applications that had been submitted following the referral of the report to the Committee, which would be dealt with either by way of delegated powers or a report to the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the approval of a grant made by the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee and the opposition spokesperson, of a grant in the sum of £170 for the supply and installation of a black litter bin for Wesson Gardens be noted.
- (2) That approval will be given to a grant of £900 being made to the Barnardo's Time for Me project towards the cost of converting the attic space at Source Wise Youth Centre into a arts and crafts room, subject to the other Area Committees approving a similar amount.
- (3) That approval be given to a grant of £5000 being made to St Peter's Church, Lapal, towards the cost of resurfacing the church and hall car parking areas and the hall access disabled pathway with tarmac.
- (4) That approval be given to a grant of £2000 being made to Cradley Community Welfare Association towards the cost of a replacement boiler and kitchen unit.
- (5) That approval be given to a grant of £5000 being made to Halesowen Swimming Club towards the cost of upgrading the facilities at the club, to include new electric timing, new antiwave lane ropes, back stroke flags and new starting blocks.
- (6) That approval be given to a grant of £280 to Halesowen Town Colts Football Club towards the cost of football training equipment.

APPLICATION IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

A report of the Interim Director of Law and Property was submitted seeking consideration of the disposal or retention of land at the rear of Cradley Library.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Adult and Community Services be advised the view of the Committee that the land should not be disposed of, as they do not consider it is appropriate for development and that there are other uses that the land can be put to.

HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted providing an update on progress with regard to physical developments taking place in and around Halesowen town centre.

In addition to the issues indicated in the report, an update was given on matters considered at the meeting of the Working Group held on 24th February, 2009. These included the following:

- Halesowen in Bloom entry – this would be subject to a successful feasibility study being piloted with a proposal to enter into the national competition in 2010 as the first year. Work would start on publicity and involve schools, retailers and communities interested in the project and the preparation of the project brief.
- Improvements to the Public Realm – these would include aesthetic improvements to the street scene, such as new furniture, use of lighting for security for illuminating public art and promoting community safety, and the development of projects on public art to celebrate Halesowen.
- Healthy Towns Initiative – the working group would be looking at ways at linking into the project. This might include signposted walkways and fitness equipment on designated pathways.
- In relation to Pool Road Car Park:
 - It was confirmed that only the upper levels of the car park would be closed at night and that access by visitors to the Cornbow Hall and Halesowen Leisure Centre from the car park would not be affected.
 - Further to issues raised by the member of the public regarding the Car Park, it was acknowledged that the running surface was in need of repair in several places. It was indicated that repairs would be undertaken as soon as practicable, once the climate was clear of frost, to enable the concrete to be laid to settle properly.
 - In response to a comment made regarding the cleanliness of the Car Park, it was confirmed that the Car Park decks were swept mechanically several times a week. The operation was undertaken early in the morning prior to the Car Park filling up. The member of the public who raised the issue was asked to notify the Directorate of the Urban Environment if there were particular locations where it was considered the sweeper might not be reaching.

- Cleanliness of stairways – it was acknowledged that the stairways were unattractive but it was confirmed that the stairwells and lifts were cleaned and mopped from top to bottom daily. It was explained that the possibility of deeper cleaning methods had been explored, such as pressure washing but that this treatment caused difficulties with regard to water retention at the base of the lifts. This was a safety issue in itself because of the electric cables. Unfortunately, therefore, there was no immediate solution to this problem.
- Need of repair of some doors – this was acknowledged and the Car Parks Officer had advised that the doors were uneconomical to repair and that replacement doors were required. However, the upper storeys of the car park were to be closed at night (with access to the Cornbow Hall and Rumbow not being affected) in an endeavour to mitigate vandalism. Because of the cost, the Car Parks Officer was reluctant to undertake work to the doors until the closure of the upper storeys, where most abuse took place, had been monitored.
- Stairwells covered in graffiti – it was pointed out that when the stairwell walls had been constructed they had been treated with a rough textured spray concrete finish which was porous and absorbed paint. The solution would be to overlay the existing walls with a smooth surface finish treated with an anti-graffiti coating. This would be looked at in terms of longer term planning and appropriate technical advice was required as well as consideration of costings. It was acknowledged that the entire structure needed a thorough clean and re-paint.

Transportation issues considered included:-

- Certain elements of the Bus Station were causing some concern, including the approach lanes and the operation of the doors. These were being kept under observation and the Council was working with Vale Retail to see what could be done with the concourse at the rear of the Bus Station.
- the installation of litterbins was being considered.
- Grills and drainage channels were being investigated.
- CENTRO were looking at a range of teething problems at the Bus Station.
- Improvements to the Grange roundabout – these would start on 6 April 2009 and it was hoped they would be completed by the end of August. There would be traffic lights at various places at different intervals. Consultation with local stakeholders would be carried out shortly and regular updates to the Committee would be provided.
- Signage to shops on the Queensway – Councillor Mrs Turner advocated that approved signage would be advantageous.

In addition, the following points were made:

- The retention of existing trees in the town centre, and the planting of more trees, was advocated by a member of the public.
- The condition of the Pool Road Car Park was considered to be a feature that disinclined potential visitors to Halesowen.
- The Signage for Asda was considered inadequate by a member of the public.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, together with the supplementary information now submitted, be noted.

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THE LEASOWES RESTORATION

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted setting out progress on the restoration of the historic landscape at Leasowes park.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

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MATTERS RAISED AT THE CRADLEY/WINDMILL HILL REGENERATION PLAN DELIVERY WORKING GROUP

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment setting out progress made by the Cradley/Windmill Hill Local Centre Regeneration Plan Working Group and indicating the content of discussions and matters considered by the Group, was submitted.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

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A456 MANOR WAY, HALESOWEN – PROPOSED 40 MPH SPEED LIMIT ORDER

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted seeking consideration of the implementation of this Order, in the light of one letter of objection received. The objection raised was that vehicle speeds during peak hours of traffic were so low that a reduction in speed on the A456 was unnecessary.

In the discussion, reference was made to a possible need to reduce the speed limit for the remaining section of the Manor Way Highway, which led to junction 3 of the M5 motorway. Differing views were expressed in this regard.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be recommended to introduce the Borough of Dudley (Manor Way, Halesowen) (40 mph Speed Limit)(Moving Traffic Number 4 Type) Order, 2009, as set out in the report submitted.
- (2) That a further report be submitted in due course seeking consideration of the extension of the 40 mph limit to the motorway junction.

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COMMUNITY RENEWAL WORKING GROUP

(Having declared a personal and prejudicial interest in this item Councillor K Turner left the meeting room during its consideration).

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted updating the Committee on progress made by the Working Group in developing the Halesowen Area Committee Community Renewal Plan.

In welcoming the initiatives included in the plan, a suggestion was made by a member of the Committee that a directory be formulated indicating the youth activities on offer at each venue.

RESOLVED

- (1) That, subject to the substitution of the words 'Youth Service' for the words 'Halesowen Youth Club' in the section of the Area Committee Community Renewal Plan relating to Highfields, the report be noted and the Community Renewal Plan, as attached to the report now submitted, be approved as a working document for the year ahead, with the Community Renewal Service reporting progress to the Committee through the Working Group.
- (2) That the Working Group consider the issue of the formulation of a directory indicating youth activities on offer at each venue.

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DATES AND VENUES OF NEXT MEETINGS

It was noted that these would be determined at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May, 2009.

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SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

The dates of forthcoming meetings of Select Committees were noted.

MIKE WILLIAMS

This being the last meeting of the Committee that he would be attending as Area Liaison Officer, the Chairman, Opposition Spokesperson and other members expressed their appreciation and paid tribute to Mr Williams' outstanding service to the Committee since its inception and wished him a long and happy retirement. In return, Mr Williams expressed his appreciation of the support given to him by the Committee and its officers during his period as Area Liaison Officer.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

CHAIRMAN