

HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE

Thursday 3rd September 2009 at 6.30 p.m.
At Colley Lane Primary School, Colley Lane, Halesowen

PRESENT

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

Officers

Area Liaison Officer (Interim Director of Finance), Head of Executive Support, Head of Economic Regeneration and Group Engineers (Mr Hodgson and Mr Holloway) – All Directorate of the Urban Environment, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Performance and Partnership) and the Area Youth Team Leader for Halesowen – both Directorate of Children's Services, Ms J Cavanagh (Marketing and Communications, Chief Executive's Directorate) and the Interim Assistant Director of Law, Property and Human Resources (Legal and Democratic Services) and Mr Sanders – both Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Jones – Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Regeneration.

Inspector H Khatkar – West Midlands Police.

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APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Ms Partridge.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

A declaration of Personal Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, was made by Councillor Mrs Faulkner in respect of Agenda Item number 13 (Delegated Capital Budget) in so far as it related to the application made by the Earls Gymnastics Club in view of her designation as the Member contact point for the Gymnastics Club.

Declarations of a Personal and Prejudicial Interest, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, were made by Councillors Crumpton and Body in respect of Agenda Item number 13 in so far as it related to the application by the Cradley Community and Welfare Association in view of their being Chairman and Vice Chairman of that organisation, respectively.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1st July, 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the following:-

- The extension of the resolution to Minute 14(a) (Ward Issues) to indicate the expenditure alleged at the meeting by Councillor Body to have been spent on Cradley High School in the sums of £70,000 up to July and £5000 per month on the changing rooms and £125,000 up to July and £3500 per week on security.
 - The extension of resolution (2) to Minute 16 (report of Halesowen Area Committee Working Groups) to request a letter being sent to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education confirming the support of the Area Committee for the wholesale regeneration of the land between Two Gates and Toys Lane.
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PETITIONS

(a) Residents of Grange Crescent.

The receipt of a petition from residents of Grange Crescent, requesting a reduction in Council Tax because of flood damage to properties, was reported. It was indicated that the petition had been referred to the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement, from which a response had been sent to the Vice Chairman of the Flood Management Committee.

In indicating that the matter of the flooding had also been referred to in the report at Agenda Item number 10, the Area Liaison Officer suggested that the petitioners might also approach the Valuation Office in relation to Council Tax bandings.

(b) Residents of Bournes Hill

The receipt of a petition from residents of Bournes Hill complaining about the activities of a tenant residing at that location was reported. It was indicated that the petition had been referred to the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services for attention.

(c) Kent Road and surrounding roads

The receipt of a petition from local residents, submitted on their behalf by Sylvia Heal, MP, requesting a greater police presence or traffic calming measures in the area of Kent Road, Halesowen as a result of the concern of the residents with regard to speeding vehicles, was reported. It was indicated that the petition had been referred to the Directorate of the Urban Environment, from whom a response had been sent stating that the site would be added to the list of requests for consideration for the installation of Vehicle Activated Signs and that the Council's mini speed advisor equipment could also be utilised.

(d) Pedestrian Safety at the Grange Roundabout

A petition of 374 signatures requesting the provision of traffic light controlled pedestrian crossings at the Grange Roundabout was received and presented by the petition organiser, Mr John Young. In presenting the petition, Mr Young expanded on the content of an accompanying letter in which the reasons for the concerns of the petitioners were set out. It was agreed that the petition be referred to the Directorate of the Urban Environment for attention.

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted updating the Committee on Youth Service provision in the Halesowen and Cradley Area.

The report indicated that, in order to meet both national and local targets, the Youth Service had divided the targets between the five townships in the Borough and the apportionment of the Halesowen and Cradley Area in relation to targets was set out in the report, together with relevant numbers regarding participation. Reference was made to an increase in evening Youth Provision from 9 youth work evening sessions to 14, which it had been possible to facilitate from an increase in staffing levels and capacity resulting from a recent recruitment drive. Disabled groups had been started at the Youth Centre.

Progress in relation to the initiatives being undertaken in the delivery of the Youth Offer under the two year plan for the Halesowen and Cradley Area was summarised in the report. The report indicated further that, in order to ensure consistency of delivery, all Youth Provision facilities had implemented plans of work relating to the Offer but had also provided specific responses to the demands of the particular area. Through this process young people from different units had obtained external funding via the Youth Opportunities Fund to make relevant provision in their particular areas.

RESOLVED

That the report be received and noted.

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AREA PARTNERS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER (PACT) ISSUES

In addressing the Committee on these matters, Inspector Khatkar referred to a schedule of PACT meetings arranged in the area of the Committee and urged all present to attend should they wish to raise matters of concern to the local community.

In describing the nature of issues typically raised at PACT meetings, Inspector Khatkar expressed the view that motoring issues could generally be resolved reasonably quickly but that anti-social behaviour issues were more complex and often difficult to resolve straightaway.

In the discussion on this item, one member of the public expressed concern that, following his attendance at a PACT meeting at which he had raised the matter, the question of a vehicle in the ownership of Age Concern that was parked regularly at Highfield Lane in a position he considered dangerous had still to be resolved. Inspector Khatkar agreed to discuss the matter with the member of the public with a view to resolving the situation.

In concluding, Inspector Khatkar reported on the appointment of a new Chief Constable for West Midlands Police and the focus that he proposed to give in the areas of community needs, targets and customer satisfaction. She also reported briefly on crime statistics for the Halesowen Area, the incidence of which had been reducing in the last two years.

RESOLVED

1. That the information now given be noted.
 2. That the schedule of PACT meetings be included in the information on the agendas of all future meetings of this Committee.
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31 EMERGENCY SERVICES ISSUES

No issues were raised under this item.

32 PUBLIC FORUM

- (a) Further attention was drawn by the member of the public who had raised the issue to the parking of the minibus in the ownership of Age Concern in an allegedly dangerous position in Highfield Lane, as referred to in minute 30 above. As stated, Inspector Khatkar had agreed to meet the complainant with a view to addressing the situation.
- (b) Several members of the public expressed extreme concerns regarding the problems of flooding in the Grange Crescent Area.

An allegation was made that the situation had been exacerbated since the building of residential homes and the actions of the Council and the Environment Agency in permitting such development on a flood plain was criticised. Reference was also made to information in respect of the matter which, on enquiry, had been missing from the Council's file.

In expanding on the issue, the Chairman of the Halesowen Flood Management Committee expressed the dissatisfaction of residents that Halesowen Area Committee members had not attended meetings of the Flood Management Committee. In response, the majority of members of the Committee indicated that they had not received invitations to attend and had thus been unaware of the meetings. Certain of the members for Halesowen South confirmed that they had, in fact, attended some meetings of the Flood Management Committee but made the point that they had not always been notified of meeting dates and that sometimes meetings had been convened on dates which conflicted with Council business, to which they had been obliged to award priority. The members for the Ward indicated also that they had attended meetings of the Environment Agency and had met with Council Officers. One member had attended two meetings of the Environment Agency and would be attending a further meeting in the current month.

In relation to the issue of the missing information, as referred to above, the Head of Executive Support in the Directorate of the Urban Environment agreed to review the file and report back to the member of the public who raised the issue.

33 WARD ISSUES

No issues were raised under this item.

34 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT THE MEETING OF THE
HALESOWEN AREA COMMITTEE HELD ON 1ST JULY, 2009

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted providing responses to questions raised at the meeting of the Halesowen Area Committee held on 1st July, 2009.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the Report be noted.

35 CRADLEY/WINDMILL HILL LOCAL CENTRE REGENERATION PLAN

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted indicating progress on the delivery of the Cradley/Windmill Hill Local Centre Regeneration Plan.

In presenting the report, the Head of Economic Regeneration in the Directorate of the Urban Environment indicated that 40% of the action referred to in the report had been taken. In relation to Foredraft Street, it was proposed that the issue would be consulted on shortly.

A number of questions were asked by both members of the Committee and members of the public, to which the Deputy Leader of the Council, as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, attending the meeting primarily for this item, responded to most issues. In so doing, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member reassured residents of the Council's commitment to the regeneration of the Cradley/Windmill Hill area but drew attention to the Council's budgetary position and the current economic climate and the consequential lack of private investment, which had been the main causes of delay. He confirmed, however, that Cradley and Windmill Hill remained a priority in the Council Plan.

Questions were asked, and responses given, as follows. Except as otherwise indicated, the responses were given by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member:-

- Regarding the regeneration of Colley Gate, reference was made to the derelict condition of a number of shops in the High Street and a question was asked on why compulsory purchase powers could not be effected.

Response

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member indicated that, while compulsory purchase powers were available to the Council, the process was not simple in that the Council had to prove that the benefit to the public outweighed the benefit to the private owners. Compulsory purchase was complex and could take up to four years to complete. The process was seen as a last resort in relation to land acquisition.

- A request was made by a member of the public for a meeting with Members of the Committee to be arranged specifically for Cradley residents. The member of the public asked to be advised when something concrete would happen in Cradley.

Response

In relation to the issue of the meeting, the Chairman and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member indicated that the purpose of the Halesowen Area Committee was to engage with all residents in the area, including those in Cradley. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, however, undertook to attend any public meeting convened by residents of Cradley to discuss anything in relation to regeneration in the area they wished to raise. He emphasised, however, it would not be appropriate for officers to be involved in such meetings.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member confirmed that, with regard to concrete proposals, everything suggested would be looked at.

- Questions were asked on the future use of the site of the former Cradley High School also in the context of access to the development site. In relation to the latter issue, the Chairman of the Friends of Homer Hill Park asked whether the provision of vehicular access would involve land being taken from the park, as Ormond Close did not satisfy health and safety requirements, and expressed the concern of the Friends should this be the case.

Response

In response, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member reported that he had endeavoured to engage interest in the LIFT project utilising the site. Except that there would be problems with vehicular access., the site presented a ready made opportunity to develop. There would be a need for consultation with Ward Members and the wider public if the project was to proceed. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member recognised the concerns of the Friends of the Park on the loss of any part of the land for access to the development site.

In explaining the current position at officer level, the Head of Executive Support in the Directorate of the Urban Environment confirmed that consideration was being given to possible future uses for the school site and that, in this connection, the Council was cognisant of the master planning exercise for Homer Hill Park. Officers were working with the friends of the Park but requirements regarding the access arrangements could not be determined until the future use of the school site was known. When that position had been reached, a development brief, which would show details on the proposed use of the school site, would be prepared and submitted for public consultation. The Head of Executive Support emphasised that no decisions had yet been made. The Planners were looking at the capability and constraints of the site that existed and were aware of the situation regarding the park.

RESOLVED

That the concerns of the Friends of the Park be noted.

- A local resident drew attention to motorists ignoring a turn left sign at the junction of Two Gates Lane and Stourbridge Road and turning right onto the Stourbridge Road carriageway. The member of the public who raised the issue suggested that consideration be given to making Two Gates Lane a one way street in the direction away from Stourbridge Road.

Response

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member requested that the issue be looked at by the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

- A question was asked on the consultation arrangements being made by the Council regarding proposals for the closure of Pensnett School of Technology, in the light of the consultation measures carried out in relation to Cradley High School. The question was referred to the Director of Children's Services for a written response to be submitted to the questioner. Lynda Waltho, MP, who was in the audience at the meeting, expressed her view that monies spent on securing Cradley High School following its closure could have been better spent on the regeneration of Cradley and Windmill Hill.

Response

In relation to the issue of the proposed closure of Pensnett School of Technology, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member referred to the statutory procedures that were required to be attended to and confirmed that these were being undertaken. Regarding school closures, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member pointed out that the funding of schools by way of numbers of pupils in attendance, which had contributed to the reasons for Cradley High School's closure, was a policy determined by Government and that, where pupil numbers fell below a certain limit, the continuance of the school was unsustainable.

In response to the comment made by Lynda Waltho, MP, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member suggested that she ought to be aware through her experience in Government that it was not always possible to vire public expenditure between budget heads.

- Councillor K Turner reminded the Committee of the support of the Committee for the wholesale redevelopment of Colley Gate and the potential redevelopment of the area between Toys Lane and Tanhouse Lane, matters which would be considered shortly by the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education. Recommendations that emerged would be made to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration.

Councillor K Turner also suggested that monies that would accrue to the Council from Section 106 Agreements should be directed towards the regeneration of Cradley and asked that regular reports on the sums that would accrue from this source be reported to Members of the Council in future. He advocated in particular that funding from this could be directed to the redevelopment of the wedge at Cradley.

- Councillor Crumpton asked to be advised of the reasons Colley Orchard had been repaired by the Council whereas the same facility had not been applied to Foredraft Street

Response

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member indicated that, with regard to Foredraft Street, the road was contained within an important development area but was in an extremely poor condition. There were several roads in the same position,

however, which were unadopted and the Council would not wish to set a precedent by adopting Foredraft Street. In view of the condition of the road, however, expenditure from the regeneration budget was being made available to repair the roadway to make it useable. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member indicated that, while Colley Orchard had been repaired, this had been effected in error.

- In discussing the regeneration plan for Cradley, Councillor Crumpton requested to be advised of progress on the LIFT Project, the provision of which he considered would go some way to mitigating the dissatisfaction of local residents as a consequence of the derelict condition of the High Street and the closure of Cradley High School. In this regard, he indicated that, as Chairman, Councillor Ms Partridge had wished to present a full report of the Cradley/Windmill Hill working Group to the Committee but had been refused.

Response

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member indicated that the Providence Street Methodist Church site had initially been considered as ideal for the location of the LIFT project but had not been pursued as the site had not been large enough. Alternative sites were therefore being considered. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member indicated, however, that the provision of a LIFT facility at Lye would not affect provision being made at Cradley but cautioned that a lack of funding was more likely to have an impact.

RESOLVED

That the report, together with the questions and responses given, be noted.

HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted updating the Committee on progress with regard to physical developments taking place in and around Halesowen Town Centre.

In relation to regeneration development matters, the report indicated that the first stage of work in the Action Plan had been completed in relation to proposals for improvements to public realm and to key gateways, town centre lighting and public spaces. The study was identifying opportunities for environmental improvements, which would set priorities for action and assist in allocating financial resources as and when they became available.

In relation to transportation issues, the report indicated that the Grange Island safety scheme was proceeding according to programme. All traffic crossovers were substantially complete in preparation for contraflow working, as were the outer kerb lines and service up to crossings. The temporary traffic management associated with the works had been removed wherever possible and work would continue to minimise delays. The four pedestrian crossings situated between the Grange and Hayley Green Island would be included in the scheme.

The report of the Director also referred to the events organised for the summer holiday in Somers Square and the Halesowen by the sea event.

Further to the report, the matters considered at the meeting of the Halesowen Town Centre Development Working Group held on 27th August, 2009 were reported. In relation to the regeneration issues considered, the Head of Executive Support in the Directorate of the Urban Environment reported as follows.

The Working Group had been requested to organise and oversee a competition open to pupils of schools and colleges in Halesowen to design a flag reflecting the history and culture of Halesowen with a view to its ultimate adoption by the Council. In consequence, the Working Group had considered how the competition should be organised and had recommended that it should be open to all Halesowen residents aged 16+, as well as pupils of senior schools and Halesowen College. This was in addition to the designs previously submitted to the Area Committee. The competition would run from 14th September to the 24th November and it was proposed that the Town Centre Development Working Group would give an initial appraisal of the submissions. The best two submissions would then be forwarded for consideration by the full Area Committee to select the winner. The winner would receive a framed certificate with the honour of raising the flag at a special ceremony, to which all applicants would be invited. A press release would be issued in the near future with details of how more members of the public and the schools could apply to enter the competition.

Consideration had been given to the Halesowen in Bloom initiative, and the meeting had been joined for this item by the bodies and firms partnering the Council in the initiative. Some initial work which had been completed as part of the feasibility had highlighted a number of areas within which it was agreed bloom activity should be concentrated within. The meeting agreed that two schemes should be identified and be looked into for further development as specific schemes, the first scheme being the area from the Husky Dog Island/the Asda frontage through Hagley Road/Hagley Street to Somers Square, which would fit into the broader aim for improving gateways, and the second the area around the Church, this being a central point for the community and which would also provide a good partnership development opportunity. There was a suggestion that the grassy area at the Church be made a place for a

Christmas tree during the festive season. It was now suggested that more detailed proposals be developed for these two particular areas with a view to progressing them for a Halesowen in Bloom entry in 2010.

The Head of Executive Support drew attention to the Borough's first World Rivers Week, which would be held in Halesowen in half term week of 26th to 30th October, various events in relation to which would take place throughout that week. The programme was currently being finalised and would be publicised in the near future.

In relation to transportation, the Working Group had been advised that the Grange Roundabout scheme continued to be on programme and on budget. The project should be substantially completed by the end of October. Disruption to traffic was being caused but this had not been as significant as had been anticipated.

A public consultation exercise was to be carried out with regard to the future of the subways at the roundabout at Earls Way. The subways continued to provide a problem for maintenance and a suggestion had been made that it might be better to replace the subways with surface crossings. A report back to the Committee would be made.

Under this item, a member of the public referred to problems in crossing Manor Way since the removal of their pedestrian crossing. The Area Liaison Officer indicated that a written response to the question would be sent.

RESOLVED

That the report submitted together with the oral update given, be noted.

37

DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

(Having declared personal and prejudicial interests in this item, in so far as it related to the application by the Cradley Community and Welfare Association, Councillors Body and Crumpton left the meeting room during consideration of the item after Councillor Crumpton had made representations on the matter in accordance with paragraph 12(2) of the Members' Code of Conduct).

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on applications for grant from the Delegated Capital Budget of the Committee.

RESOLVED

1. With regard to paragraph 5 of the report, the unspent earmarked funds of £20,000 for Shell Corner be referred back to the Central Capital pot for reallocation.

2. That a grant of £2,500 be made to Loaves 'n' Fishes towards a replacement delivery van, provided that the body seek match funding from Sandwell MBC for the balance.
3. That a grant of £1,000 be made to the Cradley Community and Welfare Association towards the cost of a new cooker and microwave.
4. That a grant of £2,385 be made to Vale Retail (Cornbow) Limited towards the cost of the construction of a bespoke display case, subject to assurances that the display case would be used only for community group displays and that the Town Centre Manager is consulted about the suitability of material on display.
5. That a grant of £5,000 be made to the 2nd Cradley (Saint Peter's) Scout Group towards the cost of upgrading the floor surface in the main hall of the Scout Group headquarters.
6. That a grant of £5,000 be made to the Halesowen Chamber of Trade towards the cost of purchasing some additional Christmas lights to cover the areas of the Town Centre which do not currently have any but that the making of the grant be approved for 2009/10 only.
7. That a grant of up to £3,000 be made to the Eritrean Tigre Welfare Association for funding towards a computer, printers and office storage facilities, subject to information relevant to the application being supplied to the satisfaction of the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.
8. That a grant of £5,000 be made to the Earls Gymnastic Club for funding to replace vital safety equipment.
9. That a grant of £1,477 be made to the Wollescote and St Andrew's Scouts Group towards the provision of an electrical supply and fittings to a green house and three equipment storage units on the site, as well as a provision of an internal door to enable access to the toilet from the garden area and repairs to the brickwork and painting of the three storage units.
10. That the Eritrean Tigre Welfare Association be invited to attend the Committee to make a presentation on the activities of the Association.

SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

Dates and meetings of forthcoming meetings of the Council's Select Committees were received and noted.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm.

CHAIRMAN