

**JOINT MEETING OF BRIERLEY HILL AND STOURBRIDGE AREA
COMMITTEES**

Thursday, 23rd July, 2009, at 7.00 p.m.
at the Wordsley Community Centre

PRESENT:-

BRIERLEY HILL AREA COMMITTEE

Councillor P Harley (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs Greenaway (Vice Chairman)
Councillors D Blood, Mrs E Blood, Ms Boleyn, Foster, Mrs D Harley, Ms Harris, Islam, Mrs Jordan, Miller, Nottingham, Southall, Tyler and Mrs M Wilson.

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE

Councillors Adams, Banks, Barlow, Hanif, Jones, Kettle, Knowles, Lowe, Mrs Rogers, A Turner, Mrs Walker, C Wilson and Mr Downing Co-opted Member of Stourbridge Area Committee.

Officers

The Director of the Urban Environment (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director of Culture and Leisure, Head of Museums, Greenspace and Bereavement Services, (All Directorate of the Urban Environment), Senior Account Manager (Chief Executives Directorate), Principal Solicitor and Miss K Fellows (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

Also in attendance

Chief Executive of Museums, Libraries and Archives, Mr M Cooke and Mr P Middleton, Director of L&R Consulting Limited.

together with one hundred members of the public.

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INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIRMAN.

The Chairman outlined the proceedings for the meeting, stating that there would be a presentation by L&R Consulting Limited, the independent Consultants employed by the Council to carry out the glass feasibility study. This would be followed by a public session whereby questions and comments would be received by the Committee when Members, Officers and L&R Consulting Limited would respond, followed by Members comments and questions. He advised that all comments received during the meeting, together with those received by email would be forwarded to L&R Consulting Limited for consideration as part of the glass feasibility study.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Attwood, Mrs. Cowell, Mrs P Martin and Ms P Shepherd, Co-opted Member of Stourbridge Area Committee.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member made a Declaration of Interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

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PRESENTATION BY L&R CONSULTING LIMITED AS PART OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS ON THE REVIEW OF THE MUSEUMS SERVICE.

Mr P Middleton, Director of L&R Consulting Limited, gave a verbal presentation, referring to the Glass Feasibility Study handout that had been circulated prior to the meeting, stating that L&R Consulting Limited wished to consult with as many members of the public as possible in order to ascertain their views and enter into dialogue with them. He provided assurances that anyone who had a view would have the opportunity to express these and referred to a questionnaire that would shortly appear on the Council's website in relation to the glass feasibility study.

Mr Middleton, made particular reference to the handout advising that page one provided a guide in relation to the process summary and page two referred to some of the key issues from the consultation to date. Issues surrounding the glass that was not currently on display had been raised, and requests that more of the collection should be brought into public view had been received. He also indicated that more detailed investigations would be undertaken in relation to the constraints at Broadfield House Glass Museum. The space at the Red House Glass Cone, car parking and ownership of the site together with development on the adjacent site were factors that would be taken into account, together with the increasing numbers of visitors that this facility may attract.

It was further indicated that the significance of the glass collection and the activities at Broadfield House Glass Museum and the Red House Glass Cone would be taken into account, as it had been noted that glass blowing was an activity at both sites. Linkages providing further opportunities including further and Higher Specialist Education institutions would be taken into account, together with the capital and revenue funding that would be required to finance the recommendations, such as other public sector and lottery grant prospects and other loan and capital contributions that may be available.

Mr Middleton confirmed that his contact details had been provided, and he would be happy for members of the public to contact him, should they wish to do so.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND ELECTED MEMBERS

A number of questions, comments and responses were then made and given in particular referring to the following issues:-

- The restrictiveness of the feasibility study, concentrating on the Red House Glass Cone rather than other sites that may have housed the Borough's glass collections was raised – in response, it was indicated that the aim of the Council would be to exhibit as much of the borough's glass collection as possible, and to at least exhibit the glass collection housed by Broadfield House Glass Museum. It was stated that these factors would be included within the glass feasibility study. It was further stated that as the Red House Glass Cone was situated within the glass quarter, it had been logical to investigate that site and it would have been excessive to look at all related areas. Once the feasibility study had been completed this would form a starting point to address displaying the Borough's glass collection.
- The plans of the Council should the Red House Glass Cone be sold to another interested party – in response it was indicated that the Council had registered an interest in purchasing the site, but the Council would have registered an interest in any event regardless of the current circumstances.
- Should the feasibility study determine that the Red House Glass Cone would not be a suitable facility to house the glass collection would other sites be investigated? – in response it was reported that the study would be confined to the Red House Glass Cone, and should stage one of the glass feasibility study determine that it would be a feasible site, then further detailed work would be undertaken at stage two.
- Why should Broadfield House Glass Museum be joined to the new Stuart Factory, as these were very different venues as one revealed the practical side of glass whereby the other exhibited the creativity of smaller glass makers in the area at a site that had been modified for that purpose? – in response it was indicated that the Council had to ensure that their facilities were as accessible as possible and Broadfield House Glass Museum would not qualify on that ground, and would discount a large number of the population from visiting the museum. This had only become a temporary home for the glass collection when this had been moved from Mary Stevens Park,

Stourbridge and the Council wished to find a permanent home for the collection which would be accessible to all members of the public.

- Should the Red House Glass Cone be a suitable site for the glass collection, would the collection be relocated once the site had been established or would this be put into storage? – in response it was confirmed that the glass would not be removed from Broadfield House Glass Museum until the new site had been established, and it would not be put into storage.
- In September, 2008, the press reported that the feasibility study had already begun. What had become of that feasibility study and when would it be made available to the general public? – in response it was indicated that this had been misreported as no feasibility study had been carried out at that time.
- Why were L&A Consultants Limited being employed by the Council to carry out the glass feasibility study, when there were Council employees who could carry this out? – in response it was indicated that Council employees would be unable to devote the time and expertise required to deal with the extremely important issue of creating the correct environment for the glass.
- Were there any structural problems with the Red House Glass Cone? – in response it was stated that given the age of the Red House Glass Cone it had been accepted that there could be structural problems, however there was no structural risk to the building at this stage and this would continue to be monitored.
- Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 could the cost of the feasibility study be revealed to the general public? – in response it was stated that legal advice had been sought on this matter when it had been indicated that as this information was commercially sensitive it would be exempt information under the Freedom of Information Act, and should the questioner wish to correspond with the Council, full details of the relevant exemption clause would be provided.
- The Broadfield House Glass Museum had the largest glass structured entrance in the world, and would this be protected? – in response it was indicated that Broadfield House Glass Museum would continue to be protected in terms of future usage.
- The Red House Glass Cone would be unsuitable to house the entire of the Borough's glass collection and would there be the possibility to demolish this venue and build a larger glass museum? – in response it was stated that the Red House Glass Cone was an ancient monument and a listed building, and could not be demolished. It was further indicated that the Broadfield House Glass museum

- housed a small proportion of the Borough's glass collection and the Council were looking to extend the proportion of glass displayed if possible.
- Problems with congestion due to heavy traffic around the Red House Glass Cone and further tourists causing traffic chaos – in response it was indicated that as part of the glass feasibility study, access to the venue and parking issues would be investigated.
- Would the land on the opposite side of the road to the Red House Glass Cone be utilised as a residential development, thus limiting further parking at the Red House Glass Cone? – in response it was confirmed that there had been residential planning permission for that site, however due to the economic climate the developer had indicated that there would be no intention to continue with the residential development, and this site may appear on the market at a later stage, however the vicinity in general would be considered as part of the feasibility study.
- The possibility of building a purpose built museum and linking the Council's heritage to the canal network was suggested.
- Queries were raised in relation to the square footage of the Red House Glass Cone – in response it was indicated that the feasibility study would address appropriate and quality accommodation for the glass, and in order to address these issues, the square footage would not be the only qualifying factor.
- Would the outcome of the glass feasibility study address the problems of housing the Borough's glass collection for many years to come or would it provide a short term solution? – in response it was indicated that hopefully arising from the glass feasibility study and suggested options that this would sign post what could be done in the short term and in the future and the long term solution could be added and improved upon when funds became available.
- Should L&R Consulting Limited become aware that they had been restricted by the brief provided by the Council, when carrying out the glass feasibility study were they in a position to request the Council to extend the brief? – in response it was stated that as part of their brief L&R Consulting Limited would look independently into the site and the question to be addressed would be "does this site meet the Council's aspirations"? The representative from L&R Consulting Limited advised that the Company had been involved in many studies of a similar nature, practising for over a twenty five year period, and following stage one of the glass feasibility study there would be judgments that would need to be made by the Council together with their partners when a view should be taken. Should the Red House Glass Cone not be a feasible site, then the Council could look at another range of sites within the Borough. It was confirmed that the glass feasibility study would be in the public

domain, and although L&R Consulting Limited had to work from their brief, there were wider issues to be considered.

- There was a suggestion that Himley Hall be utilised to house the Borough's glass collection – in response it was stated that Himley Hall was an established, well used facility, utilised for a variety of activities and a single site use would be sought in relation to the glass collection, therefore Himley Hall would not be feasible.
- Confirmation of the Council's objectives as far as the glass feasibility study was concerned – in response it was stated that this was outlined in the first paragraph of page one of the handout circulated by L&R Consulting Limited prior to the meeting, stating that the Council's overreaching aim would be to create an improved attraction that was of sufficient stature to do justice to the internationally renowned glass collection, and it was confirmed that should the glass feasibility study reveal that the above aim would not be met by utilising the Red House Glass Cone, then Broadfield House Glass Museum would remain.
- The position in relation to a seventeenth century glass furnace that was situated at Broadfield House Glass Museum – in response it was confirmed that the item would be considered within the glass feasibility study.
- Clarification was sought in relation to the Council's intentions, in respect of the glass feasibility study – in response it was stated that there were Council processes that were strictly adhered to, one being the budget. When considering this, the Council would look beyond the current financial year, and within the budget outline this revealed that there could be savings of £120,000 within the Museums Service. A decision had been taken to look at the re-location of the glass at Broadfield House Glass Museum in order to make this saving, which had resulted in the current glass feasibility study. However, should the feasibility study reveal that the Red House Glass Cone would not be the suitable site for the glass collection, Broadfield House Glass Museum would remain, and alternative savings would be looked for elsewhere.
- A suggestion that in order to make Broadfield House Glass Museum accessible a lift should be installed, thus saving the Council the cost of the glass feasibility study – in response it was stated that as part of the glass feasibility study not only access to but displaying the unique glass collection would be taken into account.
- What were the plans in respect of Broadfield House, should the glass collection be moved – in response it was indicated that the Council had no plans in relation to Broadfield House at the present time, however it remained an asset and the Council could dispose of it at a later stage.

- It was noted that a suggestion was made that the vacant Woolworths building in Stourbridge would be the ideal site to house the Borough's glass collection.
- It was further suggested that the Red House Glass Cone site should be carefully considered due to the number of road accidents on the main road leading to the site, and the potential for future accidents due to visitors crossing the road, with the facility being situated on a bridge.
- A statement that everyone would be supportive of the Council building a multinational museum, as there were over four hundred years of history to house within the museum, and this should form part of a regeneration and economic strategy, and that the Council should have consulted with the general public earlier in order that their views and ideas could have been considered, both in relation to siting and funding. The Council were urged to think about the long-term future of the museums service and the tourist industry – in response the Chairman confirmed that most Committee members would support the above proposals and thanked the member of the public for their comments.
- In response to a question as to the purpose of the feasibility study and the public consultation process it was stated that, the general public and the wider communities' attention had been drawn to the glass feasibility study, confirming that dependant upon the outcome of stage one, the public would also be engaged with stage two of the feasibility study.
- A member of the public indicated that in December, 2002 a meeting had taken place with the Director of the Urban Environment's predecessor to discuss the Borough's glass collection, when he had been advised that the Red House Glass Cone would be inadequate to re-house the Broadfield House Glass Collection. As Broadfield House Glass Museum housed the second most comprehensive and celebrated collection of glass in the world, it was suggested that L&R Consulting Limited visit the Corning Glass Museum in New York, which housed the most comprehensive and celebrated collection of glass in the world, in order that their facilities could be considered as part of the glass feasibility study.

At the conclusion of questions asked by members of the public, members of the Committee then raised a number of points and made comments, with particular reference to the following :-

- That the glass feasibility study should address the current economic downturn and consider delaying any further action until the economic climate improves.

- Should the glass feasibility study produce the result that the glass should remain at Broadfield House Glass Museum, a glass lift should be installed to address accessibility problems.
- A suggestion that to improve income streams the glass collection should be loaned out to form part of travelling exhibitions, and that a charitable trust agreement should be entered into to protect the future of the glass.
- The digitised system at Broadfield House Glass Museum that enabled exhibits to be brought to the front of cabinets for viewing, and the prospect that this facility would be lost, should the glass be moved.
- That the more cost effective option would be to make Broadfield House Glass Museum accessible to all members of the public and should the glass be moved and the property remain empty this would attract vandalism.
- That the glass should remain at Broadfield House Glass Museum, as this was the most appropriate facility to exhibit the Borough's heritage.
- That the Council should be striving towards providing a national tourist attraction.
- In order to create an international hub, support would be required from both elected members and members of the public.
- The possibility of finding a long term home for the Borough's glass collection.
- Developing a highly skilled heritage site to maintain the Borough's heritage.
- Thanks were expressed to the Friends of Broadfield House Glass Museum for the work that they had undertaken in relation to the museum spanning several years.
- A suggestion that promotion of regeneration and tourism within the Borough should be undertaken.
- That the common objective in relation to the Borough's glass collection of both elected members and members of the public that had been expressed at the meeting.
- A suggestion that members should approach officers, should they believe that the remit of L&R Consulting Limited had been too narrow.

- A request that Broadfield House Glass Museum should be included within the glass quarter.

A number of concerns raised by members of the public were also repeated, for example disappointment in relation to the narrowness of the glass feasibility study. Issues relating to the use and congestion should the glass collection be moved to the Red House Glass Cone and the commercial viability, ownership and security of leases on that site. Concerns in relation to the amount of the Borough's glass collection that remained in storage and the funding in order to build an adequate facility to house the vast collection and concerns relating to maintaining the Borough's heritage for future generations.

Arising from the points raised it was indicated that the glass feasibility study process had commenced as soon had been practicably possible and the higher the aspirations the longer it may take to reach those aspirations.

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CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN.

The Chairman stated that there would be a presentation in relation to the stage one findings of the glass feasibility study at Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education on Monday 7th September, 2009, followed by a public meeting that may take place at the end of September, 2009, which could be in a less formal setting with elected members, consultants and officers engaging with public. That there would be a presentation of stage one final recommendations to the Cabinet on Wednesday 28th October, 2009.

It was further stated that the meeting had provided an opportunity for members of the public and elected members to articulate their views in relation to the glass collection which they were so passionate about and maintaining the Borough's heritage remained the most important issue.

RESOLVED

That the comments made at this meeting be included and considered as part of stage one of the glass feasibility study in respect of the review of the museums service.

The meeting ended at 9.15 p.m.

CHAIRMAN