
Halesowen Area Committee – 9th September 2010

Report of the Area Liaison Officer

Responses to Questions Raised at the Halesowen Area Committee held on 7th July 2010

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the Committee of the written responses made to questions asked at the previous meeting.

Background

2. A member of the public referred to discussions held at a previous meeting on the Halesowen Library and welcomed the decision for consideration being given to the formation of the Halesowen Library Forum. However, he commented that the formation of the Forum seemed to be particularly slow and urged that the matter be proceeded with swiftly. He also suggested that when considering the membership of the Forum all current registered library users be given the opportunity to be elected as a member of the Panel. A report on the matter is included on the agenda for this meeting. With regard to queries raised about the size of stock at Halesowen Library the following information has been provided:-

Total stock 2008/09 stock count 40,750, Total stock 2009/10 stock count 33,489. It is not possible to give a full breakdown of the types of books discarded. The change in stock levels has occurred due to the correct application of the stock management policy. If customers are not able to find a book they are able to request items in stock at all libraries in the Borough. If the book is not in stock then a recommendation can be made to staff about stock, which will then be used to inform future stock purchases. The use of the library has gone up during this same period, as reported at the March Area Committee, in 2008 the number of visitors was 199,150 or c3,900 per week. In 2009 it was 201,100 a year or c4,000 per week. In a 2009 survey of library users (over 16), 47% thought the choice of books were good, 34% very good and 15% thought it was adequate, 4% thought it was poor but no-one thought it was very poor.

3. With reference to the query raised by a Member concerning gully emptying across the Cradley and Foxcote Ward, a list of blocked gullies was provided to the Green Care Team and these were attended to during the week ending 16th July. The team have advised that they will return to the area in due course for a more extensive cleaning operation.
4. Regarding the question raised by a Member relating to the damaged caused to the church wall on Park Lane, Cradley, the following information has been provided:-

Following requests for a local safety scheme to be carried out, the site has been considered on several previous occasions and this has already led to a number of initiatives to raise driver awareness through the use of improved signs, chevron, road markings, bollards, anti-skid surfacing and the periodic use of speed visor equipment. However, there seems little doubt that the damage being caused to the church wall is a result of vehicular collisions where the driver has lost control, presumably as a result of excessive speed.

Speeding issues are strictly an enforcement matter for the Police Authority but, having discussed the matter directly with the West Midlands Police Camera Enforcement Unit, this site does not satisfy the criteria that they apply to assessing sites for the deployment of either a permanent speed camera or their mobile speed camera operations. Any speed enforcement action would, therefore, need to be initiated by the local divisional police using pro laser equipment.

Further measures, in addition to those already undertaken, that the Council could consider in order to complement the Police's own initiatives is as follows:-

- Road humps – Park Lane forms part of the B4174 and, as part of the classified road network, it is preferable that traffic is encouraged to use this type of road rather than the less suitable routes which often become convenient rat runs when drivers seek to avoid traffic calmed roads. This road has also been identified by the emergency services as being of 'Strategic Importance' to their operations and, as such, the Council will normally wish to recognise that traffic calming measures not only affect response times to emergency situations but, can also affect patients who may be in a sensitive or even critical condition. Therefore, notwithstanding any other issues that may need to be considered, it is unlikely that road humps would be considered appropriate in these circumstances.
- Speed cameras – As stated above the site does not satisfy the West Midlands Police criteria for the introduction of speed cameras and, in the present financial climate, any reductions in the level of funding available for new cameras to be introduced can only reinforce this position.
- Crash barrier – The verge between the church wall and the kerb of the road is narrow, generally only 700mm. It is inadequate as a footpath for use by the public and due to the lack of available space it would not be possible to erect a steel safety fence. Temporary vertical concrete barriers could be introduced, but it would have to be accepted that this would mean that current highway standards for clearances to solid obstructions would not be met and that in instances where the measures are being provided for the benefit of a private owner, it is normal Council policy that the owner should meet the cost.
- Speed visors/variable message signs – Speed visors have been used in this area previously and this is a course of action that can be repeated periodically using existing resources. The opportunity to introduce a variable message sign is similar in some ways to the speed visor approach in that it is a flashing sign activated by moving traffic, but this type of sign can also be used to display alternating messages such as the speed limit and a warning sign such as 'Bend Ahead' with a text message below such as 'Slow Down'. The use of this type of equipment is clearly site specific and would, therefore, need to be considered as part of a future local safety scheme initiative.

- Trief kerbs – As part of the assessment process for any future local safety scheme initiatives referred to above, consideration can also be given to the use of more substantial kerbs around the bend near to the church. These are not a substitute for crash barriers but could offer a greater degree of resistance over standard kerbs to any vehicles leaving the road due to loss of control.

Finance

5. There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

Law

6. Section 111 of the Local Government Act, 1972 enables the Council to do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

Equality Impact

7. The report takes into account the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and there are no direct implications for children and young people in noting the report.

Recommendation

8. That the Committee notes the contents of the report.



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List of Background Papers

Minutes of the Committee held on 7th July 2010