

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

Monday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2008, at 6.00 pm  
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

**PRESENT:-**

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

**Officers**

Assistant Director Housing Strategy and Private Sector (Lead Officer to the Committee), Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning, Senior Assistant Director of Finance, Head of Sport and Physical Activity and Mr M Dando (Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law and Property)

**Also in Attendance**

Councillor Evans – Cabinet Member for Housing; and eight members of the public

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23      **COUNCILLOR HANIF**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Hanif to this his first meeting as a formal member of the Committee.

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24      **APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor G Davies.

Arising from this it was:

**RESOLVED**

That the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, be requested to write to Councillor Davies expressing the best wishes of the Committee, in view of his current illness, and for a speedy recovery.

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25      **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mottram declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 6 – Update on Dudley Archives and Local History Relocation – in that he is a Board Member, appointed by the Council, to the Board of the Black Country Living Museum.

Councillor Mottram left the meeting for the consideration of this item.

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26      PUBLIC FORUM

As the members of the public present were in attendance, in particular, for the next item on the agenda – Update on Dudley Archives and Local History Relocation – it was agreed that they be allowed to speak as part of the consideration of that item.

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27      UPDATE ON DUDLEY ARCHIVES AND LOCAL HISTORY RELOCATION

Kate Millin, Assistant Director, Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning, gave a presentation on the potential relocation of Dudley Archives to the Black Country Living Museum arising from a feasibility study that had been commissioned pursuant to a decision of the Cabinet made on 12th September, 2007.

The presentation, copies of which had previously been circulated to members of the Committee, set out details of the proposed location, plans and ideas arising from the feasibility study.

The details showed in particular photographs of the proposed location and suggested positioning of the new archive building and plans and diagrams indicating that all the facilities for example, search rooms, quiet rooms and conservation areas currently lacking in the current facilities could be accommodated in the new building. The storage facilities for use by all three partners in the project, this Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and the Black Country Museum would cater for twentyfive years expansion of service. The new building could also accommodate other uses for example with regard to education and learning as well as linkages with the museum.

In respect of the details shown for the lower basement these could be used as a storage facility and being underground would help to better manage the conditions in which the archives are kept.

In all the details indicated that the plans were feasible and the National Archives Service when shown the details were very pleased with the outcome and considered that it was an excellent way forward unlike the current accommodation and previous options considered.

Arising from the comments made the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services reported that an indication had recently been given that the Archives Service would be inspected in January, 2009 and in order for the Council to keep its licence to run an Archives Service the inspectors would expect to see a set of robust plans being proceeded with. She was confident that the inspectors would be satisfied with the option that had been formulated.

Following the comments made the Chairman indicated to members of the public that they could ask questions and Mr Guest, of the Friends of the Mount Pleasant School, raised a number of points relating to the arrangements with respect to both Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and the Black Country Museum in respect of the proposals; made reference as to whether an application had been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund; reiterated previous comments made regarding the original feasibility study in respect of Mount Pleasant School and the costings quoted which he considered should be in the public domain as he and his colleagues still considered that facilities should be retained at the Mount Pleasant School to assist with overall regeneration initiatives for the area. Following the comments made by Mr Guest, Mr Wilkes, a further member of the public, circulated a document in his capacity as Chairman of the Coseley Civic Trust giving detailed information on Coseley and the Mount Pleasant School in particular and also making reference to regeneration issues in respect of Coseley.

A further member of the public then circulated and commented upon a note from the Friends of the Mount Pleasant School Committee citing instances that, in their opinion, showed that Coseley was treated differently from other areas of the borough. In addition issues regarding car parking should the new facility be built on the site indicated were raised.

In response to the various points raised the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services indicated that

- In respect of the current site at the Mount Pleasant School it was still the case that the development of the site was not a practical proposition hence the policy decision made to undertake the feasibility study to relocate to a further site. It was also reported that Listed Building status had been sought for the Mount Pleasant site previously by a body external to the Council, however, this had not been successful.
- The proposed site for the new archives at the end of the confectionery area at the Black Country Museum was considered to have synergy with the Museum and would provide services for the whole of the Borough.

- Regarding arrangements in respect of the project mention was made of the Project Board and the sharing of the Chairmanship between Councillor Evans and Councillor Horton of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. Although a signed agreement had not been entered into there was an agreement in principle to proceed made on behalf of both Councils.
- Given the nature of the feasibility study a number of details still needed to be worked through and the issue of car parking was one such issue. Various options, for example the use of the overspill car park and making better use of the current space, could however be considered.
- It was also considered that people using the Museum would not necessarily arrive and depart at the same times as those who wished to use the archives only and that there would probably be a car parking charge for those people who wished to use their cars to access the archives.
- If Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council did not wish to proceed with this project, and there was no indication that this was the case, however, if this did happen the size of the proposed building would be scaled back so that the storage area required by Sandwell would not be included.
- As previously indicated Sandwell wish to retain their primary site in their borough and use the proposed site as an overspill facility for their archives.
- Regarding the Heritage Lottery Fund a bid had not been made as monies available from that fund had been fully committed and currently further monies were not available. Funding options were therefore being fully investigated.
- It was considered that the project would enhance the services provided by the Black Country Museum and would be complementary to their main service.
- In respect of the wider regeneration issue reference was made to two projects, those involving Midland Heart and the enhancement of Roseville Day Centre, which were seen as important initiatives in this respect.

Following on from the comments made, Councillor Evans commented in particular on the main concern which was to preserve the archive material and given the current position with the existing site the need for a purpose built building to address those concerns which it was considered could be met in line with the feasibility study now undertaken.

Members then asked a number of questions relating to the feasibility study, the proposed building and its location and in response the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services indicated that:-

- The Mount Pleasant site was not listed as it was not considered to be of historical importance.
- As previously indicated there was a Project Board which Sandwell were fully signed up to and although there was a lot of detail it could not be discussed as it was commercially sensitive .
- The proposed location was not in a flood zone and further ground condition works would be necessary before storage facilities were introduced.
- As previously indicated the presentation contained indicative plans only and therefore this would not necessarily mean that there would be underground facilities. However, the design of the facility would fully meet BS5454, which neither the present site nor other options considered did.
- It was hoped to start work on site in 2010/11 following full commitment to the project and identification of funding. This project, however, was a necessity for the Council to undertake and, if necessary, prudential borrowing could be used together with the capital receipt from the existing site.
- In the interim the Council would be taking all relevant measures to ensure that the Archives held were maintained.
- In response to a question from Councillor Blood regarding usage of the Mount Pleasant site the Director would arrange for him to be informed of the actual usage numbers.
- Measures were currently being taken to preserve the Archives in the current building, for example, controlling the temperature, the use of protective boxes and repackaging of items so as to ensure extra safety and care. Material was also being protected using specialist firms and a contract had been entered into with a company to deal with any issues that may arise. Regular checks were also made of archive material.
- Regarding the need for the new building to blend in with the existing buildings at the Black Country Museum it was reported that this matter was receiving attention so that the new building did fully blend in with its surroundings.

Arising from points made regarding the overall regenerative aspects in relation to Coseley, it was suggested and agreed that the Committee visit the Mount Pleasant site, and other relevant sites in the Coseley area, on a date and at a time to be arranged.

Arising from the comments made and responses given to questions raised by members, Councillor Evans considered that the feasibility study indicated the way forward for the Archives Service for years to come and fully agreed with previous comments made regarding the need for the new building to blend in with the buildings at the Black Country Museum. He further considered that on the wider regenerative issue the sale of the site of the current archives could help to regenerate Coseley.

Following final comments made, the Chairman thanked the Assistant Director, Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning for the presentation given and Mr Guest, on behalf of his colleagues, thanked the Chairman and Members for the opportunity given to raise questions.

#### RESOLVED

- 1) That the information as now reported, arising from the presentation given in respect of the feasibility study undertaken for the relocation of Dudley Archives to the Black Country Living Museum, and as reported at the meeting, be noted.
- 2) That the Lead Officer to the Committee be requested to arrange for the Committee to visit the Mount Pleasant site and other relevant sites in the Coseley area on a date and at a time to be arranged.

#### UPDATE ON THE MODERNISATION OF LIBRARY SERVICE

A report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services was submitted updating the Committee on the Modernisation programme for the Dudley Library Service.

The Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning commented on the content of the report submitted arising from which a number of questions were asked and comments made relating in particular to the positive comments made regarding consultation with staff on the remodelling proposals; details regarding the high national profile that the modernisation programme had received and the better tailoring of the service to the needs of the people of the borough arising from the proposals.

#### RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on the progress to date of the Library Modernisation Programme, be noted.

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### UPDATE OF THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGY

A report of the Director of Finance was submitted on the Update of the Council's Strategy a copy of which was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

Following comments made by the Senior Assistant Director of Finance on those parts of the capital strategy relevant to the terms of reference of this Committee members commented in particular on the following matters:-

- Extending Midland Metro from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill in relation to which it was noted that West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority considered the extension to be a top priority, together with the extension to Snow Hill, and that the factors leading to the actual carrying out of works were, it was considered, dependent on national government policy.
- That given the reported £5 million deficit in the Council's budget any reductions in budgets should not fall on regeneration, culture or leisure activities in particular funding for the Innovation Centre.
- A request that the use of family membership for the accessing of leisure services form part of the report to be considered at the January meeting of this Committee when a report on leisure centre investment update to include community usage of leisure centres was due to be submitted. In response it was reported that steps had been taken to rationalise the accessing of services and the bringing in of family memberships at the earliest opportunity was being looked at. A comment was also made about the need to standardise charging between the various leisure centres in the borough.

#### RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report submitted on the Update of the Council's Capital Strategy, be noted and that the Cabinet be informed that there were no specific issues that the committee wished to be taken into account when the Strategy was considered by full Council.

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### UPDATE ON PLANNING APPLICATION STATISTICS RELATING TO APARTMENT DEVELOPMENTS

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on housing completions and planning application statistics relating to housing and apartment construction.

Mr M Dando, Directorate of the Urban Environment, commented on the content of the report which showed in particular that the percentage of flats/apartments in 2007/2008 had fallen to 36% of housing completions compared with 49% in the previous year. It was noted that of the number of dwellings on sites with outline permission but not yet developed, 56% of those related to flats. Though this could reduce dramatically.

Arising from the comments made, members commented in particular on the need for suitable housing to be available for people who worked in the borough, in particular those who wished to have a house, and on the need for housing in general to meet the different life stages of people.

Consideration was also given to the current financial climate and the impact this was likely to have on future completions.

#### RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted, on housing completions and planning applications statistics relating to housing and apartment construction, be noted.

#### QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

A report of the Lead Officer to the Committee was submitted on performance in the first quarter of 2008/09, April to June, 2008, in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of the committee.

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

- The improved performance in respect of the turnaround time of Major Planning Applications and the Turnaround time of Other Planning Applications on which the committee asked that their commendation of the Directorate of the Urban Environment in respect of this improved performance be recorded.
- Following on from the foregoing matter and arising from a query it was agreed that the Director of the Urban Environment arrange for Councillor Blood to be informed as to whether the improved performance reflected an increase in the number of planning applications being determined by officers together with the actual numbers involved.



- Arising from a query regarding the completion of works at The Leasowes it was agreed that a further report on The Leasowes restoration project be submitted to the March 2009 meeting of the Committee.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the information contained in the report, and Appendix to the report, submitted on performance in the first quarter of 2008/09, April to June, 2008, in relation to the activities relating to the terms of reference of this Committee, be noted.
- (2) That the Director of the Urban Environment be requested to arrange for Councillor Blood to receive the information requested, in relation to performance in respect of planning applications, and for the submission of an update report to the March, 2009, meeting of this Committee in respect of the Leasowes Restoration Project.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm

CHAIRMAN