

DUDLEY BOROUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Monday 18th May, 2009 at 6.30pm in Committee Room 3 at the Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley

PRESENT: -

Mr M Freer (Chairman)
Mr D Woodruff (Vice-Chairman)

Mr D Bates, Mr R Burgess, Mr D Davies, Mrs C Freer and Mr R Vickers.

Officers:

Mr J Butler – Development Group Engineer and Mrs P Russell Tourism Development Officer (Both Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Miss K Fellows – Democratic Services Officer, (Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources).

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr T Antill and Mr A Cutler.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

53. MINUTES

That the Minutes of the Forum held on 16th March, 2009, be approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:-

The deletion of "J Butler" from Apologies for Absence.

The deletion of "a further consultation in April, 2009" and the replacement of "an ongoing consultation which would commence shortly" in the second paragraph, first line of Minute number 48(b).

54. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ROWIP)

The Members discussed the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, and recommended that Mr Antill and Mr Woodruff be nominated to the ROWIP Steering Group with the proviso that should either be unable to attend meetings, they would be substituted by other forum members.

It was suggested that as Statutory Consultees the Ramblers Association should be invited to appoint representatives to the steering group.

RESOLVED

- (1) That Mr Antill and Mr Woodruff be nominated to the ROWIP Steering Group.
- (2) That Democratic Services send a copy of this Minute to Mr M Holloway, Group Engineer and Ms K Perkins Transportation Officer, in order for them to contact the Ramblers Association.

55. WRENS NEST NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE – HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND (HLF) PROJECT.

Mrs P Russell, Tourism Development Officer and Project Manager presented the report, and gave a power point presentation on the progress of the Wren's Nest HLF project.

During the presentation Mrs Russell indicated that Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve had been the first urban national nature reserve recognised for geology, being one of the most abundant geological sites in the United Kingdom.

The Heritage Lottery Fund proposals were referred to, including the process through which the application for funding must pass, and she advised members in detail of the aims and objectives of the Ripples Through Time project.

It was reported that the overall vision in relation to the Nature Reserve had been broken down into five phases, and that the council were in a position to deliver the first stage of the Ripples Through Time project, which would include in particular the following:-

- The provision of three full time and one part time Warden, and a Community Development Officer;
- Access enhancements to include accessibility for those on mobility scooters.
- The provision of unrestricted access at the Seven Sisters Mine, as this currently had no access;
- Access to the key features such as the Ripple Beds, including step replacement, the provision of hand rails and entrance points;
- A series of walks would be defined and way-markers would be installed to enable visitors to follow pre-defined routes;
- Maps illustrating access routes would be displayed, and areas for the provision of car parking would be provided;

It was further reported that in order to promote interpretation and learning, interpretation boards would be erected at the nature reserve, and there would be a learning education programme which would include work with the local community in order to enhance ownership of the varying sites in relation to the project. She advised that the provision for the cost of maintenance had been included within the budget for the project, although it was hoped that by enhancing ownership this would reduce vandalism and anti social behaviour at the varying sites.

It was indicated that there would be six new welcome signs at entrances and six new pedestrian points. Fifteen locations had been identified for further interpretation across the nature reserve which would include key features such as fossil trenches and lime stone workings.

It was stated that there would be a learning plan which would adopt a creative approach on how education would be delivered for the nature reserve. This would provide opportunities from primary school to university level and partnerships were currently being formed with different schools to achieve the above.

It was reported that the development of learning resources would include on-site and outreach programmes, website downloadable packages, (including pod cast).

It was further reported that when asked visitors indicated that they would like unrestricted access to the locations across the nature reserve. Therefore fencing around the Seven Sisters and two new viewing platforms would be created including the re-grading of the viewing area to the Seven Sisters mines. The members viewed photographs of the viewing platforms dating back to the 1960's in order to illustrate the work that would be required to re-grade the above areas.

It was indicated that there would be a Seven Sisters mine open day on 6th June, 2009 as part of the discover Dudley Weekend, which would be hosted by Friends of Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve.

It was reported that the final plans for the project would be submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in June, 2009, with a decision being expected in September, 2009 with work commencing on site in March, 2010.

Members raised several questions in relation to promoting the Black Country, and encouraging visitors to stay for longer periods time in order to provide job opportunities to local communities, and provide a source of income during the economic downturn and for the future. Concerns were raised in relation to the lack of a visitor information centre for the area, and the promotion of the Black Country as a whole.

In responding to members questions and concerns, Mrs Russell advised that visitors were being encouraged to stay for longer periods of time, and that the Black Country Living Museum and other attractions had been and would continue to be utilised as a source of advertising the Black Country. The hotels and attractions of the area were currently working together to attract group visitor packages.

It was indicated that the amount of funding for promotion and marketing was limited, however the People's Millennium funding programme in 2007 had raised awareness of the project and in turn the Black Country.

It was stated that an accommodation guide for the borough was published on a yearly basis and the Discover Dudley weekend was a source of promoting the area.

The Chairman congratulated those involved with the project, and confirmed that the Forum supported and would continue to support the project and encouraged the provision of a visitor centre to the area to promote tourism.

In responding to this, Mrs Russell advised that phase two of the project would address acquiring a major site for the visitor centre.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Russell for the presentation, and requested her to keep the forum informed on the progress of the project, advising that they were solidly behind the project.

56. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In relation to minute number 41 – Closure of section of path providing access to the canal and the Leasowes, the chairman reported that he had received letters forwarded to the council by Ms M Diller, representative of Friends of Leasowes, requesting guidance on making the footpaths from Leasowes to Lady Pool Close and West Dean Close definitive public rights of way, and arising from consideration of this, it was

AGREED

That the Chairman provide Mr J Butler with the correspondence he had received relating to the above in order that the assistance that the council could provide would be provided.

In relation to minute number 49 – Site visit – The Bridleway off Turls Hill Road/Setton Drive Mr Bates referred to the events surrounding the opening of the historic path referred to, and advised that a video and interviews of all events could be accessed via the website woodsetton.trust.webs.com.

Mr D Davies and Mrs C Freer advised that they had attended the opening event, indicating that this had been an excellent project, providing an absolute transformation of the path.

57. COOMBESWOOD GREEN WEDGE PLANNING DECISION

The Chairman presented the report submitted relating to a case study review of the planning decision for the Coombeswood Green Wedge.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Mr J Bulter advised the forum of the consultation process undertaken.

The chairman raised concerns in relation to the closure or diversion of footpaths, following the planning decision.

Mr J Butler reported that surveys with interested parties who had submitted Coombswood footpath statements were coming to a close, and it was anticipated that the final appointment would take place towards the end of the week, however he understood that a further resident with whom discussions had been entered into previously was away on holiday,

and their return was awaited.

Following questions from members relating to the planning decision, the Chairman advised that as planning permission had been obtained, should the modification order be successful, the paths could be closed or diverted in any event.

Following a further question from a member, the Chairman advised that should footpaths be proposals for diversion or closure, and there were objections that could not be resolved, the Secretary of State would initiate a Public Inquiry to determine the modification order, paths may be approved as definitive, removed or diverted in any event. A further option open to interested parties would be to appeal against the planning decision.

It was further indicated that St Modwen could now commence the development, and this was affirmed by Mr J Butler.

Following further discussions in relation to concerns that the application had been pre-judged, prior to the receipt of evidence relating to the applications for modification orders, and discussions surrounding the Council adopting a plan in 1993 recommending that some of the paths should become definitive and the general assumption that this would be adopted by the council, thus limiting the number of objectors to the planning application, it was

AGREED

That this item appear on future agendas of the forum.

58. THE SANCTUARY

Mr Woodruff advised that the report had not been completed, as further consultation would be required with both the Canal Society and British Waterways and it was

AGREED

That this item be deferred to a future meeting of the Forum.

59. RESPONSE TO DRAFT PARKS AND GREEN SPACE STRATEGY (FEBRUARY 2009) – NOTICE OF FORMAL CONSULTATION.

The Chairman thanked the members of the sub-committee for the work that they had undertaken in relation to the strategy, advising that the disappointing aspect of this strategy had been that some land could be sold for housing development purposes, thus placing pressure on smaller amenities, and members agreed that an adopt and see approach should be taken in relation to the effect the forum's report had on the final strategy.

60. TREHERNS FARM – PUBLIC ENQUIRY

The Chairman reported that the Chief Executive of the Council, had acknowledged receipt of the report forwarded to him by the Forum and stated that a response was awaited.

It was further reported that an email had been received from a local resident relating to high fencing that had been erected around the site and it was

AGREED

That the Forum's response to the local resident should be that their reports in relation to the matter were in the public domain, and as a final decision had been made in relation to the planning application, the forum could not provide any further assistance.

61. FLOODING OF FOOTPATH H26 – Coombeswood.

Mr J Butler reported that prior to this site being utilised as a tip, a watercourse ran across the site, this had been culverted and material had then been tipped over the site for some time. Further CCTV footage had revealed the collapse of the culvert and a cost estimate was awaited for the culverting work reported on.

Members raised concerns in relation to the amount of damage that may be done as a result of culverting work, and requested that should the work be undertaken, measures should be put in place to limit the damage that may be done to the path and surrounding area.

AGREED

That Mr J Bulter be requested to keep the forum advised in relation to the flooding of the footpath.

62. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

(a) Coombswood H23 – Chancel Way to Amber Way

Mr J Butler indicated that a report was awaited from Mr A Radford – Technician Engineer, and that as soon as this was available, this matter would be reported on at a future meeting of the Forum.

(b) H23 – Gainsford Drive to Coombes Road.

Following discussions it was agreed that the members of the forum nominated to the steering group referred to in Minute 54 would refer to this path when discussing the rights of way improvement plan, and this item would remain upon the forum's agenda.

(c) Plan no. P08/096 – Land adjacent to 107 Long Lane, Halesowen.

This matter was considered further, however as a planning application had not been submitted to the Development Control Committee and it was

AGREED

That this item be deferred to the next meeting of the forum.

63. GATING ORDERS – MURCROFT ROAD/WYCHBURY ROAD

Mr J Butler reported that this gating order was subject to the standard consultation, whereby the Police, residents and local housing groups would be consulted, and once all information had been collated, the forum would be consulted as statutory consultees to gating orders.

It was further reported that the gating order expired in February, 2010.

The Chairman raised concerns in relation to the information provided from the Police in the past on a review of gating orders, stating that all information held by the Police had not been provided including crime figures. Mr J Butler advised the forum that the Police had been requested to provide their response to the consultation in a format that may be made available to external bodies, organisations and the public to view. Following further discussion it was

AGREED

- (a) That Mr Butler be requested to write to West Midlands Police explaining that the forum would require all information in relation to the gating order, and that they were entitled to this information as statutory consultees.
- (b) That Mr J Butler be requested to arrange a site visit, for the forum to attend Murcroft/Wychbury Road, Wollescote on Wednesday 17th June, 2009 at 11am, and for an appropriate officer to be in attendance to deal with any questions by the members relating to gating orders.

64. FILE CUTTERS - COSELEY

Following further discussions it was

AGREED

That Mr J Butler be requested to arrange a site visit for the Forum to attend File Cutters, Coseley on Wednesday 17th June, 2009 at 2.30pm, and for an appropriate officer to be in attendance to deal with any questions by the members relating to gating orders.

65. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- (a) Mr Woodruff reported that he had received confirmation from Groundwork Black Country that the first stage of the bid for lottery funding in relation to the refurbishment of Dudley No. 2 Canal had been successful, and that the project would now continue through

to the second stage of the bid process.

- (b) Mrs Freer circulated a leaflet in relation to the Dudley Walking Festival, which had taken place between the 26th April and 5th May, 2009, involving a series of walks, talks and events unveiling the history and beauty of the Borough of Dudley, stating that she had been pleased that positive events had been organised.

66. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

That the next meetings of the Forum be held on:-

- Monday 20th July, 2009
- Monday 21st September, 2009
- Monday 16th November, 2009

All meetings to start at 6.30pm

The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN