

## DUDLEY BOROUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2007 at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 3 at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

### PRESENT: -

Mr T Antill, Mr A Cutler, Mr D Davies and Ms D Ward, Mr N Williams, Mr D Woodruff, and Mr A Yeates.

### Officers:

Mr K Clements – Countryside Manager, Mr D Jacobs – Project Engineer: Traffic and Transportation (All Directorate of the Urban Environment, Dudley MBC) and Mr R Jewkes, Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Law and Property, Dudley MBC)

### 1 CHAIRMANSHIP OF MEETING

It was noted that as the Chairman of the Forum was not in attendance, the Vice-Chairman, Mr Woodruff would be chairing the meeting.

### 2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr R Vickers and Ms K Perkins, Public Rights of Way Access Officer.

### 3 MINUTES

#### AGREED

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Forum held on 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2007 be approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendments: -

the inclusion of Mr R Vickers in the list of members present at the meeting

the replacement of 'Trehearns' with 'Treherns' in Minute No. 4 – Matters Arising from the Minutes

the replacement of 'Ridgewood' with 'the Ridge' in paragraph 2 of Minute No. 8 – Gating Orders

### 4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

In connection with Minute No. 8 – Gating Orders, Mr Antill reported that following further correspondence with the Council’s Legal Services department, he had withdrawn his previous objections to the proposed Gating Order at the Ridge Primary School. In relation to this, he suggested that in future when similar Orders were being proposed, the Forum be given sight of the version, prior to the Order being confirmed. Members expressed agreement with this principle.

In connection with Minute No. 9 – Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Mr Jewkes reported on behalf of Ms Perkins, who had apologised for absence from the meeting. He stated that members of the Forum would be notified of the date of the consultation on the draft Plan once it had been determined. In the meantime, however, members were welcome to contact Ms Perkins with any other issues they had regarding the Plan.

In connection with Minute No. 10 – Scheduling of Future Meetings, Mr Clements reported that he had looked into the Forum’s budgetary arrangements, and had found that it did not have a dedicated individual budget. He stated that expenses associated with the Forum were currently being met from within existing budgets, and commented that creating a separate budget would not increase the amount of funding available for Forum related activities.

In relation to this, Members commented that although the creation of a separate budget would not necessarily increase the resources available, it would formalise the Forum’s financial arrangements, thus providing members with clarity in relation to what funding they did have at their disposal. It was therefore requested that an individual Local Access Forum budget be created.

Members also commented that significant increases needed to be made to the budgets allocated for footpath improvements, and requested that this be done in order that the relevant officers could begin to undertake maintenance and improvements requested previously by the Forum.

In responding to the comments made, Mr Clements gave an undertaking to take the following actions prior to the next meeting of the Forum:

1. to raise the issue of the Forum’s budget, specifically in relation to the request for a separate, individual budget to be created to meet the Forum’s costs, with the relevant management in the Directorate of the Urban Environment.
2. to forward the comments regarding the footpaths budget to the Technician Engineer – Street Maintenance, and request that he make representations to the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture in relation to the need for the budget to be increased.

## 5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Member declared an interest in any matter to be discussed on the agenda.

## 6 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

AGREED

1. That Mr Freer be elected Chairman of the Forum for the twelve-month period expiring on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008.
2. That Mr Woodruff be elected Vice-Chairman of the Forum for the twelve-month period expiring on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

## 7 PLANNING APPLICATIONS

### a. Coombeswood

Mr Jacobs reported that various works had been carried out in Coombeswood in recent weeks to improve the condition of the path. Some of the work, including some concreting and the erection of a sign, was still to be completed. However, the condition of the path had been substantially improved and it was now open to the public.

### b. Treherns Farm

Mr Clements reported that he had recently met with colleagues to discuss the planting of trees and hedgerows as part of the development. Comments regarding the different species which to be used and the areas in which they should be planted had been forwarded to the landscape architect. Mr Jacobs reported that once the Hedgerow Management Plan had been completed satisfactorily, work could commence on making the necessary Rights of Way Orders. It was envisaged that Legal Services would start work on the Orders within the next fortnight.

### c. Castle Hill

It was noted that progress in relation to this application had been slow in recent months, and therefore there were no developments to report.

The pending application from Cradley Heathens Speedway Club was discussed. It was noted that although an application had been received by the Authority, it had been returned to the applicant due to certain required information being missing. In view of the likelihood of an application having been successfully submitted by the time the Forum next met, it was

AGREED

That, 'Cradley Speedway' be added to the 'Planning Applications' agenda item for future meetings of the Forum.

## 8 GATING ORDERS

Mr Jacobs reported that following the confirmation of Orders relating to Gornal Wood crematorium, Murcroft Road and Hayes Lane, gates were now being erected in those areas.

Mr Jacobs also reported that although requests came in regularly for Gating Orders to be made, the Council did not currently have any plans to make further orders.

## 9 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

In addition to the previous discussion of this issue under the 'Matters Arising from the Minutes' agenda item, it was noted that the draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan would be submitted to the next meeting of the Forum for comments.

## 10 SCHEDULING OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The issue of the future scheduling of Forum meetings was discussed. It was widely agreed that it would be beneficial for a schedule of meeting dates for the coming twelve months to be agreed, in order that members could note the dates in their diaries in advance. It was also felt that the agreeing of a definite schedule would formalise the arrangements for the distribution of agendas and reports in advance of meetings.

### AGREED

1. That the following schedule of meeting dates be provisionally agreed, for confirmation at the next meeting of the Forum, with all meetings to be held, where possible, at 6.30pm in Committee Room 3 at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley: -

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2008

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2008

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2008

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2008

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2008

Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2008

2. That Mr Jewkes be requested to establish a schedule of dates relating to the above meetings, including deadlines for the notification of agenda items, report deadlines, and agenda send outs, and circulate this schedule to all relevant officers and members of the Forum in advance of the next meeting.

## 11 MEMBERSHIP

Members discussed points made at the previous meeting of the Forum in relation to the attendance of existing members and the possibilities for extending the membership to incorporate additional interested parties.

Mr Clements reported that since the last meeting he had written, at the request of the Forum, to a number of members who had been consistently absent in recent months. He undertook to report any response in this regard to the next meeting of the Forum. He also confirmed that he had contacted

both KC Dog and representatives of the local canal network regarding membership of the Forum. Neither of these groups had responded as yet.

In response to a question from a member regarding whether or not efforts had been made to engage the Borough's golf and tennis clubs, Mr Clements confirmed that in addition to Halesowen Golf Club, which was represented on the Forum, he had contacted other appropriate sports clubs during the consultation on the draft Dudley Unitary Development Plan in 2003. At that time, none of these organisations had expressed an interest in obtaining representation on the Forum. It was proposed that Mr Clements write to these organisations once again to invite them to nominate representatives to serve as Forum members. Mr Clements AGREED to ensure that this was done prior to the next meeting of the Forum.

Further to a request made at the previous meeting of the Forum, Mr Jewkes gave a demonstration of the Council's Committee Management System, including the new page relating to the Forum. He reported that in future all agendas, reports and minutes relating to Forum meetings would be published via the internet, as would details of meetings and the attendance record of Forum members.

## 12 LOCAL ACCESS FORUM HANDBOOK

Members considered a consultation document circulated by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in relation to the production of a Local Access Forum Handbook. The document requested the comments of existing Local Access Forums in relation to what information the final document should contain, and a draft table of contents of the proposed handbook had been circulated to members of the Forum.

Arising from consideration of the consultation paper and the draft document, members expressed dissatisfaction with the whole process. It was generally agreed that the timescales for the consultation were too short to enable Local Access Forums to adequately consider the issues at hand. It was felt that the draft document was too vague and did not include sufficient detail for members to discuss the fundamental points and provide a meaningful response. In light of these comments, it was

### AGREED

That, on behalf of the Forum, Mr Clements be requested to send the following response to the consultation to DEFRA: -

We, the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum, believe that we have been presented with a wide-scoping document which is too thin on detail to enable proper discussion. We also feel that the short timescale allowed for this consultation in no way allows Members of the Forum to consider in any detail the important related issues. We would welcome a chance to discuss, with proper notice, a complete draft of this handbook, and therefore request that a full draft document be circulated in order to allow Local Access Forums the opportunity to formally discuss the

relevant issues and make recommendations accordingly.

13 BLACK COUNTRY URBAN PARK BIG LOTTERY SCHEME

Members viewed a DVD which had been produced to promote the Black Country Urban Park BIG Lottery bid. The DVD outlined the various aspects of the bid, including the various projects proposed for each of the Black Country Local Authorities, and provided details in respect of the public vote process through which the winning bid would be confirmed. Members were also given with a brief outline of the other three bids which had progressed to the televised final, which would be broadcast on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> December.

14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Jacobs reported that he would be meeting shortly with relevant Council officers to consider possible alterations to Lower High Street in Stourbridge which, it was hoped, would improve access to the town centre for cyclists, and also enhance the general environment in the area. He gave an undertaking to report any developments in this regard to future meetings of the Forum.

15 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was AGREED that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2008, at 6.30pm in Committee Room 3 at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm

CHAIRMAN