

NORTH DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE

Thursday 23rd March 2006 at 6.30pm
at The Straits Primary School, Longfellow Road, Lower Gornal

PRESENT

Councillor Mrs Ameson (Chairman)
Councillors Caunt, G H Davies, Evans, Fraser-Macnamara, Mrs Millward, Mottram, Mrs Ridley, Ryder, Simms, Stanley and Wright; Mr D Round

Officers

The Director of Children's Services (as Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director of Law and Property (Legal and Democratic Services), Assistant Director (Culture and Community Services), the Senior Engineer (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Mr G Pomford (Lower Gornal Youth Centre), and Mrs Holland (Directorate of Law and Property).

Also in attendance were three representatives from West Midlands Travel and one representative from CENTRO.

Approximately 80 members of the public were in attendance.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct Councillors G Davies and Stanley declared a Personal and Prejudicial Interest in that part of Agenda Item No. 8 (Public Forum) relating to the issue of planning permission being sought for a residence in Sandyfield Road for use as a children's home, in view of the fact that they are Members of the Development Control Committee.

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MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 1st February 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed.

YOUTH ISSUES

Mr Pomford (Area Team Leader, Dudley North, Lower Gornal Youth Centre) reported on the activities of the Local Youth Centres and on the Youth Parliament elections that took place on 3rd March. He reported that three schools in the Borough had participated in the process in the North Dudley area; Dormston, High Arcal and Ellowes, together with Lower Gornal Youth Centre. Two representatives and two deputies had been elected to serve on the Youth Parliament.

Mr Pomford also reported that the Coseley Youth Centre had been closed for three weeks, mainly due to staff shortages and staff holidays. He assured the Committee that the club would re-open in the week beginning 3rd April 2006, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and on Mondays later in April/May. He reported that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance was awaited on two new members of staff before the club could be opened on Mondays. A full-time member of staff had been appointed and it was hoped that the successful candidate would take up the post in early June.

Mr Pomford also updated the meeting with regard to the Cross Border Project and informed them that the project would cease at the end of March. He also reported that members of Sedgley Youth Club had visited the Beacon Hotel area around the Beacon Hotel and talked to the manager of the hotel in a bid to encourage the young people causing the problems reported to the last Area Committee, to attend the youth centre.

A new initiative had been launched involving the Turls' Hill and Swanbrook Valley Residents' Association and pupils from High Arcal school with the aim of encouraging young people to take an interest in green belt protection, particularly in the Swanbrook Valley area. The young people were also being encouraged to become involved in the skatepark project with the Area Neighbourhood Manager. A meeting to discuss ways of involving young people in the projects would be discussed at a meeting to be held at Coseley Youth Centre.

In response to a suggestion from Councillor Mrs Millward the Committee expressed their support for a member of the Youth Parliament to be co-opted to the Area Committee for the 2006/2007 municipal year.

Mr Pomford stated that the Youth Service were concerned with regard to the issue of anti social behaviour and were working with other agencies to try and address the problems. He reported that Dudley North did not have a Detached Youth Worker and centre-based workers had become involved in doing the work.

The issue of lack of youth provision in the area for the under 13-year-old age group was raised. Mr Pomford explained the current position with regard to youth provision and the lack of staff and government funding to provide as full a service as he would like to.

In response to a question from Councillor Davies, Mr Pomford explained that there was an issue in respect of provision of government funding and asked that Councillor Mrs Ridley and Councillor Davies, who had also questioned government legislation on the provision of funding, particularly in relation to the under 13 age group, discuss the matter further with the Assistant Director for Community Education and Development. Councillor Mrs Ridley stated that the "cross border" project had produced some good work in the past but would cease at the end of the month.

Mr Round commented that unless funding was provided to employ youth workers then a service for younger children could not be made available.

In response, Mr Pomford commented that young people who had shown an interest in joining a youth club could be referred to him and he would advise them, but that, at present, there was no funding to provide the staff and otherwise cater for the under 13 years of age group.

Inspector Bailey of Sedgley Police also commented on the lack of youth provision in the area, particularly in Coseley.

RESOLVED

1. That the content of the verbal report given on youth issues be noted.
2. That the Area Liaison Officer be requested to seek a nominee from the Youth Parliament to serve as a co-opted member of this Committee for the municipal year 2006/07.

POLICE ISSUES

Inspector Bailey of Sedgley Police Station, was in attendance at the meeting and reported that the police were involved in the "extended schools" programme planned for the school holidays; on the number of telephone calls received by the police from the public; most were reports of anti social behaviour and that the figures for incidences of criminal damage had fallen.

She also submitted an apology on behalf of Chief Superintendent Green as he was unable to attend the meeting as he was out of the area. The dates of forthcoming police surgeries were also reported on.

Information was also given on the purchase of aerial cameras that could be attached to and “climb” lampposts, to assist in tackling anti social behaviour and crime and on a Prince’s Trust venture to be held at Sedgley Police Station that would demonstrate that the police were actively working with and assisting young people.

The following questions were then received by Inspector Bailey from Members of the Committee and Members of the public.

- Councillor Stanley asked Inspector Bailey for police support to prevent criminal damage being caused by mini motorbikes at Cotwall End Valley.
- Councillor Mrs Millward informed the Committee that the owner of a Go Kart track in the area had stated that he would be willing to take mini motorbikes onto the track to help in keeping them off the footpaths and roads in the area.
- Councillor Caunt expressed his disappointment that Chief Superintendent Green had been unable to attend the meeting despite having received a formal invitation to attend from the Area Liaison Officer, and particularly in view of the current issues in respect of the proposed Police Force reorganisation and the affect the reorganisation would have on the residents of North Dudley. He issued an invitation to Chief Superintendent Green via Inspector Bailey, to attend a meeting with Councillors to discuss the reorganisation and other police issues and asked that Inspector Bailey point out to him that the residents of the Borough had not been consulted with regard to the reorganisation.

Following further discussion on this latter issue, it was

RESOLVED

- (1) That, as a result of Chief Superintendent Green being unavailable to attend the meeting resulting in residents of North Dudley and Members of the North Dudley Area Committee being unable to make their views known with regard to Police reorganisation and on policing matters in general, the Area Liaison Officer be requested to write to the Chief Constable informing him of the concerns expressed by Members of the Committee with regard to the reorganisation of the Police Force and the affect it would have on the residents of the North Dudley Area.

- (2) That the Area Liaison Officer also write to the Home Secretary setting out the Committee's concerns regarding the proposals to reorganise regional policing and on the lack of consultation with members of the public, and that the Area Liaison Officer also be requested to state in the letter that in the Committee's opinion the proposals had gone "one step too far".
- Mr D Round stated that he did not think that sufficient time had been allowed for members of the public to raise questions regarding policing issues.

In response, the Chairman explained that only a certain amount of time could be allocated to each agenda item or the meeting would breach the time allocated, namely 9.30 pm.

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TRANSPORT ISSUES

The Area Liaison Officer introduced three representatives from Travel West Midlands and a representative from CENTRO who were attending in response to the Committee's invitation raised at the last meeting of the Committee, arising from consideration of the following issues:-

- Regarding the explanatory letters delivered to local households by West Midlands Travel, giving the reasons for the change in bus service, particularly to 223, in that at least five different letters were delivered to each household, each stating a different reason for changing the bus service. It was pointed out that a lot of elderly and disabled people lived on the Beacon Estate and a Petition had been raised objecting to the changes in the service. Members of the public expressed the belief that the bus route was commercially viable as the bus was used heavily by local people.

In response, a representative from Travel West Midlands explained that a bus service needed to be commercially viable but that CENTRO could step in with public money to support the service if it was considered that a specific need to keep the route open had been established.

- A member of the public asked the representatives of the bus services present to consider diverting the 224 bus service up Beacon Hill.
- Councillor Wright called for a more commercially viable vehicle to be deployed to the appropriate route.

In response a representative from West Midlands Travel explained that Travel West Midlands did not have the type of vehicle that Councillor Wright had suggested.

- Councillor Stanley commented that the bus had originally been a small bus and was used on a regular basis by people who relied on it for their day to day transport needs. He stated that he deplored the fact that Travel West Midlands had considered the plight of older people who relied on the bus service and called for Travel West Midlands to provide the service required.

In response a representative from Travel West Midlands explained that the Government set an average age for passenger vehicles of seven years.

The representative from CENTRO confirmed that CENTRO held a small budget that could be used to subsidise a commercially unviable service if it were established that there was a need for the bus route to remain in service.

The passenger loading information in respect of the 223 route was then reported on in that the service could not be subsidised unless it carried more than five passengers per hour; the average daily loading for the 223 bus had been recorded as being twenty one passengers. The difficulty of access by buses onto the housing estate in the Beacon Hill area was a further factor taken into consideration.

In response members of the public suggested alternative routes to the representatives and pointed out that a lot of very elderly and disabled people lived on the estate in question did not now have access to the shops in Sedgley.

- Councillor Evans stated that to his knowledge there were eight disabled people within the vicinity of the Beacon Hill area who caught the bus to shop in Sedgley. He stated that he had been assured in the past that only low deck vehicles would be used on the route.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Area Liaison Office be requested to arrange for a letter to be sent to Travel West Midlands requesting them to reconsider the changes made to local bus routes, namely the withdrawal of the 223 bus service from part of the route running through the North Dudley area.

- (2) That the Area Liaison Officer be requested to invite a representative from Travel West Midlands and a representative from CENTRO to attend the first meeting of the Committee in the 2006/2007 municipal year in order to review any fresh proposals for keeping the 223 bus route fully open.
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PUBLIC FORUM

(Having previously declared an interest in that part of this item relating to a question from a member of the public regarding proposals for a children's home in Sandyfield Road, Lower Gornal, Councillors Stanley and Davies left the meeting while the issue was discussed).

1. An issue with regard to proposals received by the Council for permission to convert a property in Sandyfield Road, Lower Gornal into a children's home was raised by members of the public.

In response, the Assistant Director, Directorate of Law and Property outlined the procedure that needed to be followed by all companies who sought to establish Care Homes in the Borough and confirmed that two applications had been received from Corvedale (the developer in question). He advised that the two applications would require planning permission and accordingly would be determined by the Development Control Committee. Members of the public could, if they wished to object, submit their objections to the Directorate of the Urban Environment for consideration as part of the planning process.

Councillor Fraser-Macnamara considered that the proposed property was the wrong place for the establishment of a care home and proposed that this Committee oppose the granting of planning permission and that the Development Control Committee be informed accordingly.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Development Control Committee be informed of the view of this Committee that the application for planning permission from Corvedale for the commission of an existing building in Sandyfield Road, Lower Gornal into a children's home should not be supported.
- (2) The issue was raised as to whether there would be a change of use in respect of 27 Pear Tree Lane, Coseley.

In response, the Assistant Director of Law and Property stated that he was unaware that any such application for change of use had been received.

- (3) The issue was raised regarding the relocation of the Archive Service from Coseley to Kingswinford.

In response the Area Liaison Officer stated that he would look at the decisions made historically with regard to the current Archive building.

- (4) The issue of skateparks was raised by a member of the public.

In response, the Assistant Director, Culture and Leisure explained Council's policy with regard to skateparks and reported that four sites had been identified. A specific site had also been identified in the North Dudley area for which funding was being explored.

Councillor Evans called for the project to be expedited.

- (5) The issue was raised regarding multiple planning applications and why they did not include the provision of play and sports facilities.

The Assistant Director, Culture and Leisure, responded by explaining the current legislation in respect of such developments.

- (6) The issue was raised of a blocked drain at the junction of Dimmocks Avenue/Pemberton Road/Bradleys Lane, causing flooding to the road and footpath.

A written response would be sent to the questioner in due course, following investigation into the matter by the Directorate of the Urban Environment.

- (7) The issue of the erection of speed cameras in Bradleys Lane, Coseley, was raised.

The Senior Engineer responded to the questioner explaining the current position.

- (8) The issue was raised regarding insufficient leisure and recreational facilities for young people in the area.
- (9) The issue of a proposed telephone mast at the cross roads near to the Bramford Arms and near to Bramford School was raised by a member of the public and whether the Council were aware of any developments.
- That the Area Liaison Officer be requested to arrange for a letter to be sent to the questioner following investigations of this issue.
- (10) Councillor Evans thanked the Area Liaison Officer for writing to the Prime Minister on behalf of the Committee informing him of the Committee's recommendation at their meeting held on 1st February 2006, namely, that the sale of mini motorbikes should be banned.
- (11) A question was raised regarding anti social behaviour in Dormston Drive, and of members of the public being unable to contact the Police.

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HIGHWAY MINOR WORKS CAPITAL PROGRAMME FOR 2005/2006

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on proposed programmes of work for Local Safety Schemes and a Pedestrian Crossing within the North Dudley Area for the 2006/2007 financial year.

RESOLVED

That the proposed Local Safety Schemes and pedestrian crossing outlined in Appendices A and B to the report submitted be supported, subject to the Gateway treatment/improved signs and markings on Himley Road, Dudley Scheme being submitted to the Central Dudley Area Committee for consideration as this scheme fell within their area.

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DELEGATED CAPITAL BUDGET

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on applications received for funding from the capital budget allocation of the Committee and on proposed arrangements to determine urgent applications for funding.

RESOLVED

- (1) That, subject to resolution 2 below, the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Committee and the relevant Ward Members, be authorised to determine urgent applications for capital funding.
- (2) That, in the period between the Annual Council Meeting and the election of a Chairman at the first meeting of the Area Committee in the new municipal year, the Area Liaison Officer, in consultation with the relevant Ward Councillors, be authorised to determine urgent applications for capital funding.
- (3) That the application in respect of Summerhill Forum for £16,944 to complete the installation of security fencing around the open land that covers Higgins Avenue, Harding Street and Brierley Lane, Coseley, so as to prevent motorcycles accessing the land and causing nuisance to local residents, be approved, subject to the Assistant Director, Culture and Community Services investigating whether Section 106 funding might be available in the area and to the receipt of further quotes to ensure that the funding was being used most efficiently.
- (4) (a) That, subject to the following conditions:-
 - (i) Clarification as to whether Access in Dudley had now bought a computer; and
 - (ii) That a further competitive quote be submitted, other than the one already submitted and that the applicant be informed that insurance cover for the equipment was not a capital sum,the application in respect of Access in Dudley for the purchase of a computer, be approved in the sum of £200.
- (b) That Access in Dudley be informed that, as their application was borough wide, they should consider submitting applications to the other four Area Committees for their consideration.

- (5) That the application in respect of the Darby and Joan Club, Lower Gornal towards the cost of purchasing electric hot water hand washers for the ladies and gents toilets, as well as an electric toaster and four canteen teapots, be approved in the sum of £250.00.
 - (6) That the application in respect of Sedgley in Bloom to purchase barrier baskets to provide ongoing flower displays within Sedgley Bull Ring and fronting Queen Victoria School be determined by the Area Liaison Officer and appropriate Members as indicated in either resolution 1 or 2 above.
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74 APPLICATIONS IN RESPECT OF LAND AND PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNCIL

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted regarding land and property within the Committee's area.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the Cabinet Member for Leisure be recommended to approve the application of a Wayleave in respect of land adjacent to 95 Summer Lane, Lower Gornal, indicated on the plan attached to the report submitted.
 - (2) That, subject to Ward Members approval as to the boundary of the site to be detailed on the plan, the Cabinet Member for Housing be recommended to agree to the declaration of land situated at Park Buildings, Lower Gornal, as surplus to requirements and to the land being sold on the open market for a development of bungalows, on terms and conditions to be agreed by the Director of Law and Property.
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75 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED AT PREVIOUS MEETINGS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on the current status of responses to questions posed at previous meetings of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and the appendix to the report submitted be noted.

76 WARD ISSUES

Councillor Evans expressed his concern at the rate of loss of local Post Offices in the Sedgley area.

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DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that future meetings and venues would be available on the Dudley Web Page when the Council Diary of Meetings for 2006/2007 had been finalised following local elections.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.

CHAIRMAN