

CENTRAL DUDLEY AREA COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 5th September, 2006 at 6.30 pm
at Dudley Concert Hall

PRESENT: -

Councillor Rahman (Chairman)
Councillor J. Davies (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Ahmed, Ali, Mrs. Aston, Cotterill, M. Davis, Finch, Male, Sparks and Waltho; Miss V. Little and Mrs P. Goodyear

OFFICERS:

Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (Area Liaison Officer), Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Environmental Management), Assistant Director of the Urban Environment (Economic Regeneration), Head of Design and Projects, Section Engineer, (Directorate of the Urban Environment), Principal Project Officer, Area Manager, Housing- Dudley, (Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services), Detached Youth Worker, (Directorate of Children's Services), Mr. K. Edwards, Principal Solicitor, Mrs. J Elliott, Licensing Officer and Mr. R. Jewkes (Directorate of Law and Property)

ATTENDANCE

Approximately 60 members of the public were also in attendance at the meeting.

21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bradney, Mrs Coulter, Ms Craigie and Johnston and Mrs. Edwards.

22 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor M Davis declared a personal interest in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct in respect of any agenda item relating to Social Services, in view of his being a service user.

23 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13th June, 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed.

24

PETITIONS

The following petitions were submitted by the persons indicated and referred to the officers shown for attention.

Councillor Davis, on behalf of local residents, requesting

- (a) the removal of the traffic chicanes from the Russells Hall estate. The petition was referred to the Director of the Urban Environment for his consideration and attention.
 - (b) that the Council take action in respect of the opening hours granted to take away establishments in New Street, Dudley, to reduce noise nuisance, anti social behaviour and inconsiderate parking at night. The petition was referred to the Head of Community Safety and Chief Superintendent Green of West Midlands Police for their consideration and attention.
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YOUTH ISSUES

The Chairman reported that he and Councillor Ali had met recently with representatives of the Central Dudley Youth Forum. The meeting had been very productive with the young people raising a number of issues which were of concern to them including the need for more extensive youth facilities, particularly in parks, and improvements in street lighting.

Mr Rohan Vanhorn, Youth Worker, then spoke on behalf of the Youth Forum members who were present at the meeting, reporting that they had attended a residential weekend in July. During the weekend they had successfully appointed two joint Chairs and two joint Vice-Chairs and had established a Constitution according to which the Youth Forum would operate. The residential had also included discussions regarding the Forum's main priorities in terms of what they wanted to achieve in Central Dudley. The Chairman thanked Mr Vanhorn for his presentation and thanked the young people for their attendance.

Councillor J. Davies made reference to the fact that the Youth Forum had been meeting at Beechwood House in Kates Hill, and stated that as Ward Members for that area, he and Councillor Ali would gladly attend their meetings should the Forum wish to invite them.

In response to a question from Ms Little regarding local parks, the young people in attendance stated that existing provision at local parks was geared towards children. One of the aims of the Forum was to lobby for improved park facilities for teenagers.

PUBLIC FORUM

The Chairman advised that questions would be taken from the floor should there be any time remaining when written questions had been addressed.

Questions and answers were then given as follows: -

- (1) A member of the public raised concerns regarding the lack of security at the site of the Duncan Edwards pub, Priory Road prior to the fire which had occurred on the premises, and requested clarification as to whether the Council would be seeking to recoup the costs of securing the site following the fire from the company which owned the premises at the time. In addition, it was requested that the Council take steps to force the new owners of the land to demolish the building immediately and clear the site. In responding, the Assistant Director, Environmental Management, stated that due to the premises being owned privately, the Council had limited powers to take action. Whilst it was accepted that the site was an eyesore, the premises were now securely fenced off and as far as the Council was aware there were no environmental health issues to be addressed. However, the Council would be contacting the new owners to discuss the future of the site and any development at the site would need to be in line with the Council's Planning Policy and the Unitary Development Plan (UDP).
- (2) A member of the public requested an update in respect of the action taken by the Council following the public meeting on environmental matters which had been held at Netherton Arts Centre in July. In responding, the Assistant Director, Environmental Management, stated that in light of comments made at that meeting by local residents, a mechanised sweeper had been deployed to clean the streets in the town. Positive feedback had been received from residents following this and it was expected that the service would be provided again in the future.
- (3) A member of the public raised the question of whether the salary increases given to members of the board of the new amalgamated Dudley Primary Care Trust were ethically and morally justifiable, given that the object of the amalgamation was to make healthcare in the town more financially viable, and requested that Ms Little comment on the issue. In responding, Ms Little explained that the salaries of Trust members were determined centrally by the Department of Health according to the

size of the population the Trust served. Because of this, there was very little local scope for determining the salary increases raised in the question.

- (4) A member of the public raised a question regarding refuse collections in Kates Hill. The questioner commented that as areas of Kates Hill had their refuse collected on Mondays, when bank holidays came around residents sometimes had to deal with an unacceptable build up of refuse on their property. It was requested that the Council consider changing the collection day in order to avoid this. In responding, the Assistant Director, Environmental Management gave an undertaking to look into the case and respond directly to the questioner.
- (5) A member of the public raised the issue of motorists illegally accessing the Southern Bypass through Blackacre Road and enquired as to whether the Council would consider opening that access point to enable drivers to use that entrance legally. The Assistant Director, Environmental Management, undertook to investigate the matter further and respond directly to the questioner in writing.
- (6) In response to a question from a member of the public regarding the extent to which future parking issues were considered when planning permission was granted for the extension to Russells Hall hospital, the Assistant Director, Environmental Management, undertook to investigate the issue and provide a written reply directly to the questioner.
- (7) A member of the public raised a concern regarding the untidy state of the gardens of several council properties in Corporation Road, Highfield Road and Kitchener Road, and requested that a visit be made to those streets and steps taken to ensure that the tenants at the offending properties cleaned their gardens up. In response, the Area Liaison Officer undertook to refer the matter to the relevant officers in her Directorate and request that they investigate further.
- (8) A member of the public raised concerns regarding an application he had made previously to acquire a piece of Council land at the rear of 34 Harcourt Drive, Lower Gornal, stating that since his application had been deferred at a previous meeting of the Committee on 14th March pending a meeting between the Chairman and the Ward Members, he had received no correspondence from the Council regarding the issue. In responding the Chairman said that it was his wish to arrange a site visit with the Ward Members to view the land which was the subject of the application. He gave an undertaking, in conjunction with the Assistant Director, Environmental Management, to arrange for this to be done and for the application to be determined as quickly as possible.

- (9) A member of the public raised concerns regarding the development work which was underway at the site of the former Blowers Green Timber Yard, making particular reference to the felling of approximately 200 trees on the site which were previously the subject of Tree Preservation Orders. It was alleged that the developers were carrying out construction works which did not conform to the plans originally approved by the Planning Authority. In responding, the Assistant Director, Environmental Management, referred to the 'Responses to Questions' report in the papers for the meeting which stated that the planning consent given for the development did not permit the felling of the protected trees at that point but that latterly, in view of safety concerns regarding the stability of the bank on which the trees stood, there had been no alternative but to grant permission for the felling of the trees in order to enable stabilization works to be carried out. The Council had been liaising intensively with both the developers and residents regarding the matter. In addition to this, the Chairman reported that he would be attending a meeting between officers and local Councillors to discuss the matter, following which he would liaise with the residents who were affected.
- (10) A member of the public raised a concern regarding cars driving through Dudley bus station at dangerous speeds in order to bypass traffic, and requested that the Council take action to stop this. In responding, the Section Engineer, Directorate of the Urban Environment) reported that although the Council had imposed a Traffic Regulation Order on the area preventing any cars driving through, enforcement powers relating to the Order lay with the Police. In relation to this, Inspector Moore (West Midlands Police), who was in attendance at the meeting, stated that due to the fact that a public car park was situated near the bus station, many cars had a legitimate reason to be in the area. Therefore the only way to enforce the Traffic Regulation Order would be to deploy officers specifically to monitor cars coming in and out of the bus station. The resources for this kind of deployment were not available. It was commented by the questioner that moving the entrance to the car park to Trindle Road at the other side of the site would remove the need for any cars to go into the area of the bus station. The Chairman requested that officers look into this possibility and report back to the next meeting of the Committee.
- (11) In relation to a question raised earlier in the meeting regarding motorists accessing the Southern Bypass via Blackacre Road, the member of the public who raised the original question commented that in previous years the police had prosecuted drivers for ignoring the signs at the junction and raised the question of why this was no longer happening. In responding, Inspector Moore explained that the Police had in the past deployed unmarked cars in the area to try and prevent drivers misusing the junction. However, due to there being various entrances to the bypass road

and ways of avoiding the signs, it had proved very difficult to catch drivers who were breaking the law. The Chairman suggested that a meeting be held between Members and the relevant officers to discuss what could be done about misuse of Blackacre Road.

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WARD ISSUES

Councillor Ahmed

- (1) expressed concern at the lack of car parking facilities and the high parking charges at Russells Hall Hospital. He reported that he would be meeting with the Chief Executive of the Hospital NHS Trust to discuss the issue and requested that the Council apply as much pressure as possible to get the charges reduced.
- (2) requested that the Council take measures to ensure that the site of the Duncan Edwards public house, Priory Road, was cleared up and secured.

Councillor M. Davis

- (1) expressed concern that the land application relating to 34 Harcourt Drive, which had been considered at a previous meeting of the Committee, had not been resolved. He commented that the applicant was still not clear on the progress of his application and requested that the situation be resolved.

In responding to these comments in her capacity as Director of Adult, Community and housing Services, the Area Liaison Officer reported that following discussions between the Council and the Hospital Trust, a new lower priced car parking scheme had been introduced at Russells Hall, with further discussions on the matter expected in future.

- (2) expressed concern that the increased salaries for senior officers on the new Primary Care Trust members, which had been discussed earlier on in the meeting, were excessive.
- (3) commented that car-parking charges at Russells Hall hospital were still too high for local residents. He requested that the Council use its influence to support either the removal or further reduction of the parking charges.
- (4) requested that the Council remove the traffic calming chicanes on the Russells Hall estate, particularly as a car accident had occurred on the estate the previous night where a driver had lost control whilst passing through the chicanes.
- (5) requested that the Council take action to improve the appearance of Walters Row.

In responding to this latter comment, the Assistant Director, Environmental Management advised that as Walters Row was unadopted, the Council had no scope for making repairs in the street.

- (6) raised concerns regarding the development of land to the rear of the Spar shop on the Russells Hall estate. He commented that residents did not want the land to be used for houses. However, if it was to be developed, bungalows for the elderly would be more suitable.
- (7) expressed concern regarding problems residents of Milking Bank were experiencing with drains in the area. He requested that the Council use its influence to encourage South Staffordshire Water to repair the existing drains and to install additional drains where appropriate.

Councillor Mrs. Aston

- (1) raised concerns regarding the maintenance of drains in the Wrens Nest and the Priory.
- (2) expressed concern regarding street lighting between 26 and 46 Priory Road. She reported that there were no streetlights on that side of Priory Road and that the lights on the other side of the road were currently obscured by trees. In responding, the Assistant Director, Environmental Management reported that whilst it was acceptable for the street to be lit from the opposite side, the possibility of lopping the trees in that area was being considered.

Councillor Ali

- (1) raised the problem of traffic buildup at Cinder Bank island. He requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee exploring the options for remodeling the island in order to improve the flow of traffic.
- (2) expressed concerns regarding cars speeding on Selborne Road. This was of particular concern as the new Sure Start centre was situated nearby in Buffery Road, meaning that the safety of young people attending the centre was at risk.
- (3) requested that the Council arrange to clear up rubbish on the derelict land between Cypress Road and Lupin Road, and look into the options for developing the land.

Councillor Waltho

- (1) congratulated Councillor Ali on his work in organising the St. Thomas's Olympics. He commented that the event had been a great success for the community.

- (2) expressed concern that large amounts of litter had built up in the area of Hollyhock Road and Lupin Road, despite the area being cleaned up previously by a road sweeper. He requested that a litter officer be deployed to the area to monitor the situation and prevent the build up of litter. In responding, the Assistant Director, Environmental Management, gave an undertaking to investigate the possibility of deploying a litter officer. He also requested that Councillor Waltho contact him with any additional information he had regarding the origin of the litter.

Councillor J Davies

- (1) requested that the trees in Leveson Walk off Peel Street be cut back as they were currently blocking the footpath.
- (2) raised concerns regarding the state of the pavement next to the bus stop on St. Johns Road. He requested that the Council make arrangements for the pavement to be resurfaced.
- (3) expressed concern regarding the public toilets near to Stafford St. Courts. He also reported that residents had commented that the toilets had seemingly not been cleaned for some time, and requested that officers investigate and if necessary arrange for the facilities to be cleaned.

Councillor Rahman

- (1) thanked officers from the Directorate of the Urban Environment who had attended the public meeting held in July to discuss environmental issues in Netherton. He stated that several positive outcomes were expected from the meeting, for example in relation to litter and air pollution. He also made reference to the pending implementation of the Clean Environment Act and commented that he hoped the Council would use all its powers under the Act to keep the environment clean and to prosecute those people damaging the environment.

Councillor Cotterill

- (1) expressed concern regarding the littering and fly tipping which was taking place at the nature reserve to the rear of the former Speedway site. He circulated photographs showing the current state of the area and asked that they be forwarded to the relevant officers in order that the mess could be cleaned up.

- (2) raised concerns regarding the need to provide effective heating for the Authority's older Council tenants. He commented that many of the homes occupied by more elderly tenants often had single glazed windows and old, inefficient storage heaters, meaning that the annual heating allowance provided by Central Government was not sufficient to heat their homes throughout the winter period. He requested that a Borough wide project be undertaken to update and replace heating systems in Dudley's Council houses, in order to make them as efficient as possible.

In responding, the Area Liaison Officer, in her capacity as the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, reported that the cost of replacing all the storage heaters in Council homes in Dudley would be unmanageably high, and added that the main focus for the Local Authority in terms of social housing was meeting the 'decent homes standards' specified by Central Government. Under these standards storage heaters were considered acceptable heating provision. She undertook to provide a more detailed written response to Councillor Cotterill direct.

- (3) requested that officers investigate the possibility of improving street lighting in Golden Hillock Road, as the lighting in that street was currently inadequate and potentially dangerous.
- (4) the issue of nuisance neighbours. He commented that although progress had been made in certain areas of Dudley in relation to anti-social neighbours, one particular case in his ward had been ongoing for the last two years and required immediate action. He undertook to pass on the details of the case to officers following the meeting.

Councillor Sparks

- (1) expressed concern regarding the pelican crossing in Coppice Lane. He reported that the crossing had been out of order the previous night, and requested that officers ensure that, if it had not already been done, the crossing was repaired.

Councillor Male

- (1) raised concerns on behalf of residents of the Thorns that a developer working in that area had felled trees which were the subject of a Tree Preservation Order. He requested that officers from the Development Control section look into the matter to ensure that any Tree Preservation Orders were being properly observed.

Mrs Goodyear

- (1) requested that Council employees take care when collecting refuse not to drop rubbish on pavements, as this made the streets in the Borough look untidy.

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 consideration of the application for the purchase of land adjacent to 39 Cole Street be deferred, pending a site visit to be held prior to the next meeting of the Committee.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Children's Services be recommended to declare Saltwells House, Pedmore Road, Brierley Hill, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted surplus to requirements for inclusion on the Land Disposals Programme to be sold on the open market on terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Law and Property.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture be recommended to approve the granting of a lease to the Friends of Buffery Park, for the former Sons of Rest building in Buffery Park, off Paradise/Douglas Road, Dudley, as shown on the plan attached to the report submitted, on terms and conditions to be negotiated by the Director of Law and Property.

ECONOMIC REGENERATION ACTIVITIES

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the progress of the Council's aims and economic regeneration priorities in the Central Dudley Area.

Following an introduction by the Head of Design and Projects, Members expressed support for the initiatives planned for the area. They commented that the Council as a whole needed to engage local people in regeneration projects and publicise as much as possible the heritage sites, tourist attractions and facilities already in place in order to attract people into the town. Members did though express particular concern with regard to Stone Square and commented that the facility needed to be promoted as vigorously as possible in order to fulfil its potential and contribute to the regeneration of that part of the town centre.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report submitted the be noted and that support be given in principle to the proposals to establish a Townscape Heritage Initiative in Dudley Town Centre and a Dudley Property Regeneration Partnership, as set out in the report submitted.

30

APPOINTMENT OF NOMINATIVE TRUSTEE TO CASTLE HIGH SCHOOL

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted inviting Members to consider the appointment of a nominative trustee to serve on the Castle High School Foundation in replacement for Councillor Finch, who was no longer a trustee.

RESOLVED

That Ms. V Little be appointed as one of the Council's nominative trustees to the Castle High School Foundation for the remainder of the three year period ending on 16th September, 2008.

31

AREA COMMITTEE CONSULTATION IN RELATION TO THE GAMBLING ACT 2005 AND DRAFT POLICY

A report of the Director of Law and Property was submitted on the draft Statement of Licensing Policy produced in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005.

Following a presentation on the content of the report, a Member queried regarding the enforcement arrangements of the new Act. The Licensing Officer, Directorate of Law and Property, reported that the Local Authority would be responsible for enforcing licenses issued under the Act, however the Police would be responsible for dealing with crime and disorder issues arising from gambling.

Ms Little commented that the final policy needed to ensure the protection of those most vulnerable to gambling addiction. She welcomed the specific reference in the draft policy to the protection of young people, and requested that written feedback regarding the operational management of the Act be provided to her as and when it became available.

In addition to these comments, the Area Liaison Officer, in her capacity as Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, stated that her Directorate had general responsibilities for protecting vulnerable members of society and as such would be one of several agencies working in partnership to manage the responsibilities devolved to the Local Authority under the Act.

RESOLVED

That the information contained in the report, and the draft Statement of Licensing Policy produced in accordance with the Gambling Act 2005, be received and noted, subject to the above comments.

32

DUDLEY SPORTS VILLAGE PROJECT

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on a feasibility study which had been commenced as part of the Dudley Sports Village project.

It was reported that a project team had been set up under the sponsorship of the Director of the Urban Environment to look into the development of a sports facility providing accommodation for Dudley Town Football club as well as a mixture of community sports facilities. The concept included the possibility of incorporating education and health facilities within the physical boundaries of a sports village. A project plan had been developed which included the commissioning of a feasibility study by specialist sports consultants to look into the relevant issues involved in establishing a new facility. The consultants report had been commissioned on 1st September and it was envisaged that a full report back would be completed by the end of October. The findings of this report would be reported to the Cabinet in due course, together with the views and aspirations of Members.

In responding to the report, Members welcomed the strategy which had been adopted, in particular the emphasis on providing community and education facilities, and requested that the findings of the consultants report be relayed to the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED

That information contained in the report submitted on the progress made in respect of the Dudley Sports Village Project be noted, and that further reports on the project be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

33

PENSNETT AND RUSSELLS HALL AREAS, DUDLEY: PROPOSALS FOR WAITING RESTRICTIONS

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on the proposed introduction of a limited traffic management scheme along major highway sections of residential parts of Pensnett and Dudley in the vicinity of Russells Hall Hospital which were the subject of public consultation.

To date, the consultation on the proposals had revealed a varied attitude by the residents of the areas involved. Whilst some supported the introduction of double yellow lines, others rejected the idea and requested that residents parking schemes be introduced instead. Such schemes would require the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement, whereby the Council, as Highways Authority, would take over enforcement of on-street

parking from the Police. It was reported that the legal process required to obtain this power would take at least eighteen months to complete, following which residents parking schemes could be introduced.

In view of the reaction of residents in a number of the affected areas, a reduced no waiting scheme was now being proposed which encompassed a smaller area surrounding the hospital.

In commenting on the report, Members of the Committee generally agreed that the introduction of prohibited waiting areas around the hospital, whilst addressing the problem of hospital visitors blocking vehicular access, would be detrimental to the residents of those areas who parked their vehicles on the road. It was felt that the only satisfactory solution to the problem was the introduction of a residents parking scheme whereby hospital visitors were prohibited from parking in the streets surrounding the hospital and people living in the area could use the highway for parking. In responding to these comments, the Assistant Director of the Urban Environment, Economic Regeneration, stated that residents parking schemes could only be introduced once the Council had successfully applied to the Secretary of State for Civil Parking Enforcement. The application process would take at least eighteen months to complete and could not be initiated until a resolution of the full Council was obtained requesting that an application be submitted.

The Assistant Director, Environmental Management, reiterated the recommendation in the report that support be given to the partial no waiting scheme in order that measures could be put in place while the issue of Civil Parking Enforcement was pursued by the Council.

Following further discussion on the matter it was

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be informed that the Committee do not support the proposed scheme for prohibited waiting as detailed in the report, and that he be recommended to pursue, as a matter of urgency, the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement in Dudley.

34

URBAN ENVIRONMENT - MATTERS RAISED AT CENTRAL DUDLEY
AREA COMMITTEE - 14TH MARCH, 2006

A report of the Director of the Urban Environment was submitted on a number of issues relating to that Directorate raised at the meeting of this Committee held on 13th June, 2006.

RESOLVED

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

35

SELECT COMMITTEE PUBLICITY

The Area Liaison Officer reported that as a way of giving additional publicity to meetings of the Council's Select Committees, the details of Select Committee meetings had been included on the agendas of meetings of Area Committees and drew attention to these details on the agenda for this meeting.

RESOLVED

That the information given in respect of publicity for future meetings of Select Committees, be noted.

36

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

A report of the Area Liaison Officer was submitted on written responses made to questions asked at the meeting of the Committee held on 13th June, 2006.

That the information contained in the report be noted.

37

DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the dates and venues of future meetings of this Committee, as follows, be noted:-

7th November, 2006

Sledmere Primary School,
School Drive, Dudley

16th January, 2007

Saltwells EDC, Bowling Green
Road, Dudley

13th March, 2006

Priory Primary School, Cedar
Road, Dudley

The meeting ended at 8.45 p.m.

CHAIRMAN