

DUDLEY BOROUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Tuesday, 25th September, 2012 at 6.00pm in Committee Room 3
at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

PRESENT:

Ms T Boothroyd (Chair)
Mr R J Brooks (Vice-Chair)

Mr R Burgess, Mr P Greenaway, Ms J V Lea, Mr N J Williams and Ms S Yeadon.

Officers:

Ms S Orton – Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services, Mr D Jacobs – Project Engineer, (Traffic and Transportation), Mr D Keeley – Countryside Manager, Ms L Dickinson – Principal Landscape Architect and Mr D Hodson – Senior Landscape Architect (All Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Miss K Fellows - Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Corporate Resources).

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr R Burgess and Ms S Yeadon declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Coombeswood Green Wedge as a Member of Coombeswood Canal Trust and as a Member of the Friends of Coombeswood respectively.

15. MINUTES

AGREED

That the Minutes of the Forum held on 17th July, 2012, be approved as a correct record.

16. CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Following discussions it was:-

AGREED

That Agenda Item Number 6 – Planning Applications – Castle Hill/Zoo/Black Country Proposals be considered as the next item of business followed by the remaining Agenda Items.

17. PLANNING APPLICATIONS – CASTLE HILL/ZOO/BLACK COUNTRY PROPOSALS

Ms L Dickinson and Mr D Hodson gave a verbal presentation on the proposed project in relation to a new leisure design facility linking Castle Hill, the Zoo and the Black Country Living Museum together in order to provide a new leisure facility within the Dudley Borough. Plans of the project were circulated to Members and referred to throughout the presentation.

It was reported that members of the public would have the opportunity to purchase multiple tickets to the leisure facilities with visits being open for several days. It was reported that the project would include the Dudley Archive building and the extensive work being undertaken to the Zoo was also outlined.

It was further reported that the Archive Building work was due for completion in Summer 2013 and the extensive work to the Zoo was due for completion in 2014.

The access roads and facilities such as car parking were referred to together with details of the amount and sources of funding available for the project.

Mr Hodson referred to the entrance plan to the site and the intention to provide an international visitor centre. It was noted that trees would line the roads around the site creating a boulevard concept. Accessible entrances, ramps and slip resistant hand rails would be installed together with disabled parking bays. It was stated that there would also be recreational routes and pick up points throughout the site.

Photographs of the current site were circulated to members.

Details of the public right of way that currently cuts across the site were provided and the connection from Castle Hill to the Hub of the site was referred to and measurements were outlined. It was stated that signage would be provided and Access in Dudley would be further consulted in relation to the public right of way as it was proposed that this be diverted.

In responding to a question regarding security, Ms Dickinson advised that the site would be secure from vehicles, however as the Museum was open some evenings, certain elements of the car park would remain open and security measures in relation to any potential problems with motorcycles would be addressed and monitored.

It was further noted that there would be a charge for car parking.

Mr D Jacobs referred to the sustainable links that would marry the three attractions together whilst also retaining access to the public right of way.

In relation to the current public right of way, he referred to the planning application stating that this would be an application for an order for diversion of the footpath. Details and reasoning for diverting the public right of way were also outlined.

Mr Hodson referred to the various species of animals that occupied the site stating that surveys were being undertaken in relation to bats and badgers and Consultants would be advising the Council in relation to those species who occupied the site in order to preserve their habitat.

Ms Dickinson referred to the application to demolish the Gala Bingo Building which would transform the views to Dudley Castle.

The Chair stated that the public right of way would be vastly improved and Members were requested to comment on the plans by emailing the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum group mailbox.

AGREED

That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.

18. DRAFT ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT AND FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE FORUM.

The draft Annual General Report had been distributed to Members prior to the meeting and it was agreed that details of open access land would be added to the report which would subsequently be submitted to Natural England by the Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services.

The proposed new logo for the Forum was also circulated to Members for comments and it was agreed that Ms S Yeadon would investigate whether the full name of Dudley Borough Local Access Forum could be inserted either within or outside the logo.

Members thanked the Chair and those Members involved in relation to the preparation of the report for their work in relation to the report.

AGREED

That the Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services be requested to submit the Annual General Report to Natural England following the inclusion of details of open access land within the report.

19. COOMBESWOOD GREEN WEDGE – POTTERY FARM.

The Chair advised that the transfer of land from St Modwen to the Council had not taken place in view of issues raised by B&Q in relation to vehicular access and St Modwen's raising issues in relation to the fencing which separated the nature reserve from the industrial area.

Members discussed issues relating to fencing and the issues raised by B&Q.

Mr Keeley, Countryside Manager suggested that Ms H Edwards, Park Warden, be invited to a subsequent meeting of the Forum to ascertain what could be provided on the site.

Ms Yeadon advised of an initiative arranged in order to do some clearing work on Monarch's Way on 13th and 14th October, 2012.

Mr Keeley confirmed that he would arrange to speak to the team in relation to the supervision of the work outlined above whilst volunteers were using machinery and would request the Wardens at Leasowes to contact Mr N Williams, Ms S Yeadon and Mr R Burgess in relation to carrying out the clearing work.

AGREED

That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.

20. PLANNING APPLICATIONS – DEFRA CONSULTATION – “IMPROVEMENTS TO THE POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY”.

Mr D Jacobs, Project Engineer Traffic and Transportation, reported on the DEFRA Consultation, the definitive mapping systems and their usage with comments on the protection that needed to be afforded to rights of way.

Mr D Jacobs requested Members to provide him with any comments in relation to the Consultation by emailing the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum group mailbox.

AGREED

- (a) That the report submitted on the DEFRA Consultation “Improvements to the policy and legal framework for public rights of way” and the information reported on at the meeting be noted.
- (b) That Members be requested to email the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum group mailbox with comments in relation to the consultation.

21. FORESTRY COMMISSION WOODLAND REPORT.

Mr D Keeley, Countryside Manager gave a verbal update in relation to the Forestry Commission Woodland Report specifically referring to the executive summary of the report.

AGREED

That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.

22. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CYCLING FORUM.

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

23. FOOTPATH NETWORK MANOR FARM/HALESOWEN ABBEY.

Mr D Jacobs, Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation reported that the above property remained for sale.

Members raised concerns that the particulars of sale of Manor Farm did not refer to the Public Right of Way and Mr D Jacobs addressed these concerns, stating that this would be a case of misrepresentation and there had been previous court cases in relation to misrepresentation.

Following further discussion it was

AGREED

That Mr D Jacobs, Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation, be requested to advise the Council’s Planning Section that the Forum recommend that the Planning Officers dealing with the land outlined above take into account the public right of way and the connection of that to other footpaths.

24. GATING ORDERS

Mr D Jacobs, Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation reported that an issue had been raised at the Central Dudley Area Committee in relation to a request for closure of steps from Marian Close leading into Robin Hood Road, however no decision had been made regarding this and the normal procedure in relation to possible gating would be followed.

25. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Vice Chair reported on the Rights of Way Improvement Plan referring to the Minutes of a group meeting that had been circulated to Members. He referred to discussions in relation to funding mechanisms and requested Council Officers to investigate the recruitment of volunteer footpath Wardens in accordance with the Worcestershire model.

Mr D Keeley, Countryside Manager, suggested that the Local Access Forum could act as a Core Group who could liaise with volunteers in order to clear pathways throughout the borough. He also confirmed that the Council's Senior Wardens were prepared to supervise the clearing of pathways.

The Chair advised that should the Forum be successful with recruiting volunteers to carry out clearing work this could result in more funding becoming available to conduct such work and improve public rights of ways, in the future.

In responding to a question from a Member, Mr D Jacobs, Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation advised that the Council's Streetcare Team who were based at Lister Road, Dudley were responsible for clearing gulleys.

Members were requested to advise the Chair or Vice Chair of any right of way that required improvement in order that this may be added to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

AGREED

That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.

26. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was reported that Mrs Lea had raised two items of any other business within the required time frame and both requests had been answered by Mr D Keeley, Countryside Manager.

Mr D Keeley, Countryside Manager advised that recruiting for an Assistant Warden was underway and it was hoped that this post would be filled well before Christmas, 2012.

Mr D Jacobs, Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation advised Members of a new development in Long Lane Halesowen, advising that it was proposed that a new footpath cycle way be created to link the site to the school in Narrow Lane, Halesowen.

27. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted, that the future meetings of the Forum would be held on:-

- Tuesday 20th November, 2012
- Tuesday 12th February, 2013
- Tuesday 26th March, 2013
- Tuesday 14th May, 2013
- Tuesday 16th July, 2013

It was noted that all future meetings would be held in Committee Room 4 and not as previously Committee Room 3.

All meetings to start at 6.00pm

The meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.

CHAIR