

DUDLEY BOROUGH LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Tuesday, 27th March, 2012 at 6.00pm in Committee Room 2
at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

PRESENT:

Mrs T Boothroyd (Chairman)

Councillor Banks, Mr D Bates, Mr R J Brooks, Mr R Burgess, Mr P Greenaway, Ms J V Lea, Ms A Nicholls, Councillor Woodall and Ms S Yeadon.

Officers:

Ms S Orton – Head of Museums, Greenspaces and Bereavement Services, Mrs H Martin – Head of Planning, Mr D Jacobs – Project Engineer, (Traffic and Transportation) and Mr D Keeley – Countryside Manager (All Directorate of the Urban Environment) and Miss K Fellows – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Corporate Resources)

Also in Attendance:

Mr A Turvey, Police Community Support Officer, in respect of Agenda Item No. 5 – Coombeswood Green Wedge only.

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Mr R Broome and Mr N J Williams.

41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Banks declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Coombeswood Green Wedge, Agenda Item No. 6 – Planning Applications and Agenda Item No. 7 – Access/Rights of Way Issues as Vice Chairman of the Council's Development Control Committee and the Chairman of the Council's Development Control Site Visiting Working Group.

Ms S Yeadon declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Coombeswood Green Wedge, as a Member of the Friends of Coombeswood.

Mr R Burgess declared an interest in Agenda Item No. 5 – Coombeswood Green Wedge, as a Member of Coombeswood Canal Trust.

42. MINUTES

AGREED

That the Minutes of the Forum held on 14th February, 2012 be approved as a correct record.

43. CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

Following discussions it was:-

AGREED

That Agenda Item Number 5 – Coombeswood Green Wedge, be considered as the next item of business followed by the remaining agenda items.

44. COOMBESWOOD GREEN WEDGE

A response to the Report of Mr Burgess was presented by the Countryside Manager who made particular reference to the Appendix 1 to the response, which detailed all the Planning Conditions and their current status, confirming that the Forum would be provided with updates at future meetings in relation to these.

In referring to Appendix 2 to the response, a plan of the site, he advised that this detailed the footpath routes around the Coombeswood site.

The Chairman, Countryside Manager and Members made reference to the site visit that had taken place at Coombeswood Green Wedge on 16th March, 2012 confirming that this had been extremely beneficial and Members were pleased with the outcome and the positive feedback from the people who attended. It was reported that ideas in relation to the footpaths had been exchanged and work with partners in relation to this would be investigated.

The Chairman requested that should any issues arise in relation to the Coombeswood Wedge in the future that these should be dealt with as and when they arise and requested Members to raise these on a timely basis.

In responding to a question from the Chairman in relation to the dates when the specific parcels of land would be handed over to the Council, the Countryside Manager advised that the land transfers were currently being dealt with by Officers of the Directorate of Corporate Resources who were prioritising the land that was required for the Local Nature Reserve. It was stated that Land Searches were being undertaken by those Officers and the Countryside Manager undertook to update Members as to the progress in relation to the transfers.

The Countryside Manager reported that during the site visit it had been agreed that a Work Party would be arranged that would consist of the Friends of Coombeswood, representatives of the Forum and the Council's Countryside Services in order to carry out clearance work to a section of The Monarch's Way.

He also reported that the recruitment of a Warden for the site had commenced with the post being advertised for a three week period on an internal basis.

The Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation referred to a section of land on the Coombeswood site that was previously a Council tipping facility, advising that this was now the responsibility of the developer, St Modwens. The Countryside Manager advised that the parcel of land was leased by Waste Services and there would be funding issues in relation to clearing contaminated land. However, once the Warden was in situ at the site, work would be conducted with the Friends of Coombeswood in order to investigate funding issues for dealing with that part of the site.

Mr Burgess advised that the Coombeswood Canal Trust were producing a leaflet publicising the walks around the Coombeswood Green Wedge and confirmed that he would bring this to the attention of the Forum prior to publication.

The Police Community Support Officer referred to problems with motorcyclists and quad bikers on the Coombeswood Green Wedge reporting on the number of incidents reported to the Police and that the problems referred to above had caused safety issues in relation to pedestrians and contamination issues in relation to watercourses following the tipping of abandoned motorcycles.

He reported that three offenders had been identified and were currently being dealt with.

He also stated that it would be beneficial for appropriate gating to be erected at the entrances to Coombeswood Green Wedge particularly at Stewarts Road, Monarchs Hill and Gorsty Hill in order to prevent motorcyclists and quad bikers entering the area.

There followed a detailed discussion by Members and Officers in relation to gating issues and the accessibility to all users. The advantages and disadvantages of erecting gating/fencing was also referred to, as gating areas could also be a cause of anti social behaviour rather than a prevention.

The Countryside Manager advised that once a Warden was in post on the site, this may create a presence and sense of ownership and could prevent future problems with motorcyclists and quad bikers occurring and he undertook to convene a meeting with Mr Turvey, the Police Community Support Officer, in order to investigate issues of signage. He also emphasised that the cost of signage would be a matter for the developers.

AGREED

- (1) That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Planning, in conjunction with the Countryside Manager, be requested to provide further updates to the Forum in relation to the planning conditions imposed in relation to the Coombeswood Green Wedge.
- (3) That the Countryside Manager be requested to provide updates to future meetings of the Forum in relation to the progress with the transfer of the relevant parcels of land to the Council referred to above.

- (4) That the Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation and Countryside Manager convene a meeting with Mr Turvey, Police Community Support Officer, in order to investigate the issue of gating Stewarts Road, Monarchs Hill and Gorsty Hill and the provision of signage.
- (5) That the Project Engineer, Traffic and Transportation and Countryside Manager update the Forum in relation to issues of gating and signage in respect of the above at a future meeting.

45. FEEDBACK FROM THE NATIONAL LOCAL ACCESS FORUM CONFERENCE – 6TH MARCH, 2012 – BRISTOL AND PATHS FOR COMMUNITIES.

The Chairman reported that she had attended the above conference on 6th March, 2012, referring to her discussions with Members of other Access Fora and representatives from Natural England and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs.

The Chairman advised that following her discussions with other Access Fora Members it had become apparent that the Dudley Borough Local Access Forum was one of the best organised and supported Access Forums in the Country. She referred to the exceptional support network and that this had been evidenced by her discussions with Angela Smith, representative from Natural England who had previously attended a meeting of the Forum, when she had advised the Chairman that the Forum was one of the best organised and professional Local Access Forums that she dealt with around the Country.

The Chairman also referred to the support received from Council Officers, thanking Officers for their support.

She also reported that other Local Access Fora utilised multi media to consult with the public and encourage them to attend meetings and referred to their use of Twitter and encouraged this Forum to investigate utilising such multi media to advertise the Forum and encourage engagement with members of the public.

It was agreed that Mr Burgess would include the Forum's contact details on the leaflet that was being produced by Coombeswood Canal Trust by way of publicity.

The Chairman also advised that Angela Smith the Co-ordinator for Local Access Fora had suggested arranging a meeting of Local Access Forum Chairmen or their representatives, and requested Members support for this suggestion.

She also referred to the "Huddle" system, which would provide a pro-forma for the Forum's Annual Report, which would then be placed onto the system. She advised that Mr Keeley, Countryside Manager, was the registered user of Huddle on behalf of the Forum in order that he could

monitor the system and update the Forum.

The Chairman referred to a new two year grant system that would be available from Natural England advising that funding of £1million during 2012/13 and £1million during 2013/14 would be available, indicating that the funding would be available for predominantly rural pathways and as soon as the grant criteria was made available the Countryside Manager would advise the Forum.

She suggested that a Working Group consisting of the Coombeswood Canal Trust, the Forum and the Council may need to be established in the future, in order to consider such an application for funding.

AGREED

- (1) That the information reported on at the meeting by the Chairman be noted.
- (2) That the Countryside Manager be requested to advise the Forum of the Natural England Funding Criteria outlined above once this was made available.

46. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

No items were raised.

47. ACCESS/RIGHTS OF WAY ISSUES

Mr D Bates referred to Roper Way in Sedgley and the Section 106 Agreement to install a footpath that was entered into by the original developers of the site. He advised that several developers had purchased the site following the original agreement being entered into and the current developers were disputing that they had been made aware of the agreement when they purchased the site.

In response the Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation advised that extensive negotiations would be undertaken with the developer in relation to the Section 106 Agreement, however should negotiations be unsuccessful this may result in a Public Inquiry.

He also undertook to update Members in relation to the above matter.

In responding to a question from Mr Bates in relation to a pathway that had been adjacent to the High Arcal School in Sedgley, the Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation advised that this would not automatically become a designated footpath as this depended upon whether the landowners requested this and confirmed that should the landowners need to make an application in this regard he would inform Mr Bates accordingly.

AGREED

- (1) That the information reported on at the meeting be noted.
- (2) That the Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation be requested to update Members in relation to the Section 106 Agreement referred to above.

48. GATING ORDERS

The Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation advised that a report was being prepared in relation to the application for the Gating Order in Kilburn Drive, Kingswinford which would incorporate the views of the Forum and the Ramblers Association and he would report the outcome in relation to the application to the next meeting of the Forum.

AGREED

That the Project Engineer – Traffic and Transportation be requested to advise the Forum of the outcome of the application for the Gating Order in Kilburn Drive, Kingswinford at a future meeting.

49. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN – SUGGESTIONS FOR ROWIP ACTION PLAN 2012/13 – COOMBESWOOD FOOTPATHS – H26 AND H21.

The Chairman requested Members suggestions on any footpaths that required improvement that could be included in the above plan.

She also suggested that Members give consideration to the representation of the Forum in relation to the Local Transport Plan Group. It was understood that the Local Transport Plan in the area was probably representative of both Birmingham and the Black Country and in all likelihood would not be able to accommodate a representative from all of the Local Access Forums within that area. It was suggested that Angela Smith, the regional Co-Coordinator for Local Access Forums be contacted in order to ascertain how other West Midlands Fora were dealing with this issue. It was also suggested that the Countryside Manager investigate this with Officers in the Highways and Transportation department of the Council.

Following further discussions in relation to footpaths that required improvement Ms Yeadon suggested the following footpaths be added to the Rowip Action Plan 2012/13:-

- H26 – the Pathway from the Canal to the Coombeswood Green Wedge;
- H26 – Pathway continuing up towards Green Lane as there were fencing issues in relation to both sides of the pathway with chain link fencing restricting the width of the pathway;
- H26 – There were way marker issues on some stages of the pathway with these being required at Muklows Hill and Gorsty Hill

sections of the site;

- H21 – There were issues in relation to the wooden steps being overgrown which was restricting access;
- H13 – Way markers were required towards Gorsty Hill;
- That the Monarchs Way towards the top of the pathway was overgrown;
- H15 – The link from the Coombeswood Green Wedge to the Canal side required attention;

Mr Greenaway requested that the following pathways be incorporated into the ROWIP Action Plan 2012/13:-

- Ellowes Road to Turners Hill Road, Gornal Wood;
- Old Quarry Drive, Gornal Wood to the end of the site at Cotwall End Local Nature Reserve;

AGREED

- (1) That the information reported on at the Meeting be noted.
- (2) That the Countryside Manager be requested to liaise with Ms A Smith, Co-Coordinator for the Local Access Forums, in relation to appointing a representative from this Forum to the Local Transport Plan Group.
- (3) That the Countryside Manager be requested to discuss representation on the Local Transport Plan Group with Officers within the Highways and Transportation Department of the Council.
- (4) That the Chairman and Mr Brooks refer the above suggestions for the ROWIP Action Plan 2012/13 to the next ROWIP meeting.

50. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FORUM.

Following discussion it was:-

AGREED

That the Chairman, Mr Burgess and Ms Yeadon prepare the Annual Report of the Forum.

51. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was noted that no items had been raised.

52. DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE AGENDA PLANNING MEETINGS

It was noted that future Agenda Planning meetings of the Forum would be held on:-

- Monday 16th April, 2012 – 10.30am – Committee Room 4, The Council House, Dudley.
- Monday 18th June, 2012 – 11am – Committee Room 4, The Council House, Dudley.

53. DATES AND VENUES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that future meetings of the Forum would be held on:-

- Tuesday 15th May, 2012;
- Tuesday 17th July, 2012.

All meetings to commence at 6pm.

The meeting ended at 7.40 p.m.

CHAIRMAN