



WEC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MEETING (3)

MEETING MINUTES

7:00 pm Tuesday 5th July 2016 at Smestow Community School

FCCA:

Chairman Andrew Atkinson
Committee members Brenda Bates Heather Rous Judith Tanswell
Minutes secretary Barbara Cole

Wolverhampton City Council Housing Strategy and Development:

Alison Fowler

Wolverhampton City Council Councillor:

Cllr Wendy Thompson

Members of the Public:

David Bennett
Linda Cox
David Mawdsley
John Rowley
John Tanswell

1. Introductions

Andrew Atkinson welcomed all to the third public engagement meeting being held to discuss Wolverhampton City Council's proposals for the future development and use of the former Wolverhampton Environment Centre (the WEC).

Andrew introduced Alison Fowler from Wolverhampton City Council (WCC) Housing Strategy and Development and Wendy Thompson, Councillor for Tettenhall Wightwick. He also introduced FCCA Committee members Brenda Bates, Heather Rous and Judith Tanswell and FCCA minutes secretary Barbara Cole.

2. Presentation of Wolverhampton City Council's Proposals

Alison Fowler asked the audience whether they would prefer her to give the presentation or take questions first. The presentation first option was taken.

Alison said that she had additional information to give the audience following on from the two engagement meetings that were held in the previous week. She then presented the background and current proposals for the WEC.

WCC have been reviewing potential for the future use of the WEC and holding discussions with the Tettenhall and District Community Council (TDCC) and Finchfield and Castlecroft Community Association (FCCA). Alison said that it is still early days and not much has changed since the meeting held with FCCA last December. WCC wish to engage with the Community at a very early stage, looking at what fits in with Community. No planning application has been submitted for any development.

Alison talked the audience through the proposed plan for the WEC which was projected on the wall. She described the stippled area on the plan as going into the Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and being open to the public. The white area on the plan currently contains 8 glasshouses, a bungalow and a lot of debris. WCC seek the development of 14 housing units in this area to generate capital receipt which would finance the rest of the WEC being released into the LNR. Alison also spoke of the footpaths, allotments and car parking provision. She said that the Local Neighbourhood Plan (LNP) had been looked at and the items that the public wanted to see had been accommodated. The stippled area going into the LNR would be protected indefinitely. There would be no more than 14 housing units. Individuals buying the houses would need to ask for planning permission for changes to their homes as permitted development rights would be removed.

Alison said that ecological surveys had taken place looking at wildlife, badger setts and crested newts. No reptiles or bat roosts had currently been found. More specific surveys will be carried out.

Discussions have been held with the Highways department about bringing the access road up to adopted standard plus drainage. No costs on drainage are currently available. The cost of removing the glasshouses would be approximately £150,000, due to the necessity of removing the shattered glass and debris by hand. There are also a lot of railway sleepers on the site. There is a lot of work to do in order to make the site safe for the public.

Alison said that a question about the provision of more allotments had been asked during the previous week's engagement meetings. However, the allotment area cannot extend further to the west because of the trees. There is a choice between trees or allotments. The 4 runs in the plan could be split into 8 half runs.

The landscape architect Dave Purdie has been asked about putting secure sheds into the plan and costing them. Following last week's meeting a camera is also planned.

The existing ornamental gates could be put into the plan but the public would need to say which end they want them to be sited. It could mean losing allotment space. They do not need to open. Alison said that this could be followed up at a later date.

3. Discussion

Linda Cox raised the issue of who would monitor the camera. Would it be the police? Alison agreed to follow up this question.

John Rowley asked how many trees would be lost. There is a fine beech hedge and some leylandi trees. Alison said that Highways would need to be spoken to about this but if the road is not to be widened this should not be an issue. John asked whether the trees at the top of the quarry would be taken down. Alison replied not unless it was recommended as part of the woodland management plan.

David Mawdsley commented that he had first heard about the proposals for the WEC in the Wolverhampton Chronicle. Originally there were 4 houses proposed but now there are

14. Alison said that the original plan was for 5 large houses but this was changed following the meeting in December when people said that they would prefer family houses to executive homes. Heather Rous agreed that this was what the Steering Group had asked for.

Judith Tanswell asked if the houses would be 2 storey. Alison confirmed that they would.

Linda Cox expressed concern that trees would come down before anyone had a chance to stop them being taken down. She said that she wanted to see someone who was independent working on the woodland management plan and that it should be part of the whole SVLNR management plan. Alison said that the report would be commissioned from someone who was independent. It would probably be Dave Purdie who had already worked on the ecological surveys. Linda said that she would like to see Simon Atkinson from the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country involved. Alison said that she would check where and if Simon would be involved in the woodland management plan. Linda also said that Terms of Reference should be in place for the Smestow Valley Advisory Group when it starts to meet up again.

Brenda Bates spoke about the management of trees. She said that it is an emotive subject but sometimes trees need to be managed and removed. The public must decide what they want from the LNR and think of the whole thing including plants and small mammals not just trees and the view.

Heather Rous spoke of her time working with Simon Atkinson from the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country and pupils from St Edmunds. Trees had been felled in the SVLNR Barleyfield as part of the woodland management plan. In addition, blue bells had been planted. Unfortunately the exercise had not continued due to lack of funds.

John Rowley raised the subject of an indicative capital receipt mentioned in the last meeting stated by Ward Cllr Thompson. There is potential for the capital receipt from the sale of part of the WEC site to developers being in excess of £700,000. There is a concern that there will be a large capital receipt, some of it will go into site readiness preparing the WEC for going into the LNR but WCC will decide upon what happens to the balance. There is currently no assurance from WCC about how much of the capital receipt will be ring fenced for the portion of the WEC which is going into the LNR or if any will go back into the local area.

Cllr Thompson indicated that the capital receipt could reach £1,000,000 and gave the example of Compton Grange where £460,000 in Section 106 money had been lost to the local area

Linda Cox asked specifically for the minutes to reflect that the meeting strongly stated that a substantial percentage of the capital receipt should come back into the local area. John Rowley supported Linda in this issue. Alison Fowler said that she would take this back to Cllr Billson at WCC.

Heather Rous said that it was confusing because FCCA had been assured that the capital receipt money would be ring fenced for 10 years. Cllr Thompson pointed out that it depended on the definition of "the money". There are two lots of money. Firstly, £70,000 of Section 106 money which is intertwined with the Black Country wide ERDF funds bid, then there is the capital receipt (which could be in the region of £700,000 to £1,000,000). Some of this will go into site readiness but there will be a lot more than what is required for site readiness. The amount is unknown until the land is sold.

Brenda spoke of the early meetings that had taken place with Michelle Ross. There was no mention of Section 106 money or the ERDF bid. The only thing that was discussed originally was capital receipt which would be ring fenced. Brenda said that she felt that the

meeting was developing into a discussion about money rather than what was the best for the future of the WEC. She added that what was the alternative to houses?

Cllr Thompson commented that the original capital receipt when 5 houses were proposed may have been less than that now anticipated. The utilisation of the capital receipt is not just the decision of Michelle Ross. It involves other members of council staff.

Brenda responded that FCCA do not have access to all the information and therefore have to do what they think is best based upon what they are told.

Linda Cox said that she would like to make the following three points about people in the local area:

- They appreciate what FCCA do
- They worry about what happens to the WEC
- They do not like WCC taking money from the area, a lot of services for the elderly have gone, rangers have gone. WCC are not investing in the area. People would like the proposals for the WEC to happen but are not happy with the money obtained from the capital receipt being used elsewhere

David Mawdsley from Broadway, Finchfield spoke about a motorbike issue. He was informed that the situation had been dealt with. PCSOs had been round and spoken to the motor bike rider. However David said that there had been another one last night and today. He said that there were steel gates at the WEC but a hole had been chopped in the beech hedge. David was informed that this would be addressed in the plan for the WEC

Alison asked for the views about the use of the capital receipt money to be sent to her in an email. She would then take it back to discuss with Finance and Senior Employees of the Council. Linda Cox said that a substantial percentage of the capital receipt money should stay in the area. She asked who should represent the views, FCCA or the LNP Steering Group? Heather replied FCCA. Linda said that they should also ask for support from TDCC.

John said that Brenda's question on what the alternative to housing was had not been addressed. He suggested that Landfill Tax (a Community fund) could be used to clear the site (this may be possible because of the quarry at Himley). An application could be made for up to £50,000 in order to open the closed area at the WEC to the public. £100,000 would still be required but this could be sourced by the sale of the bungalow at the WEC. Linda Cox commented that on-going maintenance would still be an issue. John said that there were people who were interested in setting up entrepreneurial businesses at the WEC e.g. a nursery. Linda and Judith replied that this would bring additional traffic which was not wanted. John pointed out that 14 new houses would also bring additional traffic.

Andrew said that only WCC had actually put any proposals on the table.

Heather commented that John's proposals were good but would need project management. WCC would project manage their proposals but who would manage John's proposals?

Cllr Thompson advised that the email that is going to be sent to Alison requesting that a substantial percentage of the capital receipt should stay in the area, needs to be very clear about what is being asked for,

A show of hands was asked for by Andrew to determine if there was agreement in the audience that if the housing proposal was accepted then a substantial percentage of the capital receipt should be ring fenced for the local area. The show of hands was unanimous. Andrew said that FCCA would follow it up. He also said that there was no

answer as to what an alternative to housing could be.

Linda commented that this was an engagement meeting not a consultation. Engagement does not have a legal standing, whereas consultation, which is subsequent to engagement does have a legal standing. She said that in her view the development would go ahead anyway. The important thing is coming up with a deal.

John quoted the figures of those voting in favour of the LNP. In his opinion if the housing development goes ahead, the LNP is not worth anything. Heather and Linda said that management was required and that money was needed to meet the LNP objectives.

Heather said that she would agree to the housing but the next stage is to agree on the details and the money. She added that something needs to be done before the site becomes unmanageable. Linda added that someone needs to cost how much it would take to get the LNR back on course. Alison said that Section 106 or capital receipt money could go back into the LNR. Heather wanted both Section 106 and capital receipt.

John said that the £50,000 from Landfill tax could be used to make the site safe giving time for other options to be considered. However, he recognised that he was a lone voice.

Cllr Thompson said that she understands the objectives of the LNP but there were caveats and time has moved on since 2014. She has sympathy for John's views but practicalities move on. There are now new issues. People want security and the site is deteriorating. People who live close by have road issues. She said that what she had understood from the meeting was that the concerns for the environment had come through and if there were going to be houses, then there is a view that a substantial percentage of the capital receipt and Section 106 money should be used for the local area.

John said that the LNP is being ignored but perhaps this can be used as a lever to get more money. If the housing development brings benefit then we "put up with it".

Alison summarised the following views from the meeting for her to take back to WCC:

- The development would be restricted to 14 units (5 x 2 bed and 9 x 3 or 4 bed)
- Each unit to be no more than 2 storeys
- There would be a removal of permitted development rights on the new houses
- The balance of capital receipts after expenses would be used to re-open the WEC and for management of the LNR
- Some of the capital receipt would be used on a report on the management of the LNR and in managing the LNR

John asked if the minutes of the meeting would be available. Andrew said that they would be available to all who had provided email addresses

David Bennett gave his views as follows:

- No development is not an option
- He does not want to see trees removed
- The big issue is money

At this point Andrew brought the meeting to a close