



WEC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MEETING (4)

MEETING MINUTES

7:00 pm Thursday 7th 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

Members of the Public:

Linda Cox
Wenonah Davies
Maurice James
Sue Joyce
John Rowley
Karen Shaw
John Tanswell

1. Introductions

Andrew Atkinson welcomed all to the fourth 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. 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 said that she had additional information to give the audience following on from the three previous engagement meetings. She asked the audience whether they would prefer her to give the presentation or take questions first. The presentation first option was taken. She then presented the background and current proposals for the WEC.

Alison said that following the departure of Groundworks, WCC had 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). 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.

The original plan had consisted of 5 large houses. However, this was changed following discussions with the Steering Group as it was felt that it did not cater for the needs of local people. The current proposals consist of 14 housing units (5 x 2 bed room and 9 x 3 or 4 bed room). None of the houses would be more than 2 storeys.

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 stippled area going into the LNR would be protected indefinitely. The white area on the plan currently contains 8 glasshouses, a bungalow, broken glass, railway sleepers 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 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.

At the beginning of 2016 Property Services looked at cost of removing the glasshouses and estimated that it would be approximately £150,000, due to the necessity of removing the shattered glass and debris by hand. There is a lot of work to do in order to make the site safe for the public.

Alison said that £205,000 a proportion of the capital receipt from the sale of the land would be used for clearance to open up the site, provision of 8 allotments, car parking and footpaths for walkers. There is also work to be done in management of the meadow area.

Alison said that the Local Neighbourhood Plan (LNP) had been looked at and the items that the public wanted to see had been accommodated. This was with the exception of a MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) which was no longer required. A Community Centre was mentioned in the LNP but there was not enough money for it and it had not been included in any of the proposals. Before any further action is taken WCC wish to get public engagement.

Alison said that the proposals are a compromise. A lot of money needs to be found. There is housing development but it is on a small and sensitive scale. There would be no more than 14 housing units, with no more than 2 storeys. Individuals buying the houses would need to ask for planning permission for changes to their homes as permitted development rights have the potential to be removed.

There is no intention to touch trees on the site except for the purpose of woodland management. 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.

Dave Purdie, the landscape architect has been asked about putting secure sheds into the plan and costing them (approximately £12,000). Following last week's meeting a camera on a pole is also planned. More work is required in order to determine who will monitor it. The camera will need to be powerful in order to cover the allotments. It will need to cover 360 degrees and have facial recognition (similar to the camera at the Institute in Tettenhall Wood). Alison said that she would check on the specification and get Dave Purdie to look into it.

Discussions have been held with the Highways department about bringing the access road up to adopted standard (but not widened) plus drainage. No costs on drainage are currently available. Highways have estimated that it will take £125,000 to £130,000 to bring the road up to adopted standard. The developer would be expected to do this but it would come off the capital receipt.

In summary, the outline costs could be:

- £150,000 demolition of greenhouses and removal of rubble
- £130,000 as an initial estimate to bring road up to adoptive standard
- £205,000 clearance to open up site, allotments, car parking, footpaths and sheds

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.

3. Discussion

Linda Cox said that she had spoken to Simon Atkinson from the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country about the Smestow Valley Local Nature Reserve management plan. He had told her that the plan still stands but will need a few minor alterations and will need to be extended to cover the WEC. However, there is no need for a further survey to take place with the money coming out of the capital receipt.

Alison said that she had spoken to Michelle Ross from Strategic Planning about looking at the woodland and management plan. She was to ask Simon Atkinson if anything else needs to be done. Simon Atkinson is undertaking work for Steve Woodward (Head of Public Realm Services) on the LNR. The Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust are to summarise benefits with reference to the existing SVLNR management plan for the ERDF bid. WCC are trying to persuade the Environment Agency to contribute £400,000 towards the Wolverhampton part of the overall Black Country bid. The money has already been awarded by the EU and therefore will not be impacted when Britain leaves the EU. The funding bids are for the allocation of the ERDF money not for obtaining the money in the first place.

Brenda said that the money is in the detail. Agreement on the proposals must come first. This was endorsed by John Rowley.

Wenonah Davies introduced herself as a Compton walker and chair of Tettenhall and District Horticultural Society. She was accompanied by Sue Joyce, the secretary. She said that she was interested in the allotments and thought that there would have been more of them, although she now understood that it is a choice of trees versus allotments. She commented that the proposal for the WEC seems to be a reasonable plan and that she would go with it.

Maurice James asked about the fencing, as some of it on the site is in currently in poor condition. Alison said that she had spoken to Dave Purdie, the landscape architect, about it. He has listed all that needs to be done, removing existing and providing new fencing in certain areas (for example, the quarry). Alison also mentioned that Dave Purdie had identified a cost of £600 to relocate fish from the pond.

Brenda observed that a lot of detail had gone into the plan and said that she was quite heartened by this. Andrew said that it gave him confidence in the proposals.

John observed that in the last meeting Cllr Wendy Thompson had indicated that the capital receipt from the sale of the land for development could be in the region of £700,000 to £1,000,000. Alison said that she did not know what the price of the houses would be. When asked about affordable housing she said that not enough houses were being built for this to be a requirement.

John asked when the planning application would be submitted. Alison said that she did not know but it could possibly be in 2 to 3 months' time.

Linda said that she had knocked on the doors of some of the houses close to the WEC. Most of the people are elderly, in their 90's or are carers for the elderly. They were not prepared to come out to meetings in the evenings. She spoke to 3 nurses who could not attend due to shift work. There were also people with young children who could not come out. All of these people had expressed an interest in what was going to happen to the WEC. Linda said that WCC should take on board the fact that not everyone could attend meetings in the evening. She asked that in future, at least one meeting could take place during the day. Andrew suggested that the minutes of the meetings and the plan could be distributed to those living nearby the WEC if required.

Linda said that the feedback that she had received indicated a concern about increased site traffic and taking children down the track. Alison said that there may need to be street furniture for safe crossing places.

A discussion took place about how the meetings had been publicised and whether there had been enough publicity.

Wenonah Davies asked when comments on the proposals are needed by. Alison said that the ERDF bid goes in on 29th July and WCC are asking for comments by 19th July.

Karen Shaw said that she had attended the current meeting because she wanted to know what is happening. She said that she thinks that the proposals are good and that it will make the area safer for walking her dog.

Andrew said that a lot of the information that had been made available would not have been available if questions had not been asked in the last three meetings. He thanked Alison for coming back so quickly with the answers.

John asked whether WCC (as the landowner) would be selling the land with planning permission. Alison said that there would be pre application discussion but nothing beyond that. John asked if exceptional circumstances would be claimed for housing development as has happened at Compton Park. Alison said that John would need to contact Steven Alexander about the planning issues.

Judith Tanswell thanked Alison very much for her work

Sue Joyce asked if the plans would be made available to the public. Alison said that when the developers have a design and access statement, it will go back out to the community.

John commented on the fact that there were no young people at the meeting. He said that he was perturbed because he often sees groups of youths with nothing to do. He asked if something could be put into the WEC proposals giving them somewhere to play. Alison said that she could go back and ask Steve Woodward if there is any Section 106 money for a bike track. Brenda responded by pointing out that this would not be in keeping with a local nature reserve. Linda added that there could be some educational things connected with nature put into the WEC.

4. Next Steps

Alison summarised the next steps as follows:

- FCCA should write to her either individually or as a group documenting their views on the proposals for the WEC. There must be a formal response
- Alison will meet with Cllr Billson to update him on progress
- Alison will then feedback to FCCA and the Steering Group for the LNP on outstanding matters
- The beech hedge
- Reports required for the woodland land management plan from advice from Simon Atkinson
- The information for the site works to be uplifted to include camera and secure sheds
- The indicative cost of works for the highway
- Alison will write a Cabinet Resources Report including the relevant points raised during the engagement
- There will be a Cabinet meeting followed by feedback to the group

Linda asked when the outcome would be known. Alison replied that it would be at least 3-6 months

At this point the meeting was brought to a close. Everyone thanked Alison for her work.