



WEC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MEETING (5)

MEETING MINUTES

6:30 pm Tuesday 13th June 2017 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 Karen James

Wolverhampton City Council Councillor:

Cllr Wendy Thompson

Tettenhall & District Community Council:

Cyril Randles Pat Powell

Wightwick and Regis Enterprise Network (WREN):

John Rowley

Members of the Public:

Chris Ager	Simon Holmes
Jim Barrow	Lesley Leader
Andrea Cantrill	Susan Poude
Alice Dodd	Patricia Sheldon
Melissa Cook	William Swanson
Maxine Connor	Max Taylor
Paul Fereday	Keith Ward

1. Introductions

Andrew Atkinson introduced the meeting as the fifth public engagement meeting to be held to discuss the proposals of Wolverhampton City Council (WCC) for the future of the former Wolverhampton Environmental Centre (the WEC).

Previous meetings had been held in 2016 on 28th June, 29th June, 5th July and 7th July

2. Under the Bridge Project (Castlecroft Bridge)

As this meeting was a FCCA public meeting, in addition to being a WEC public engagement meeting, Andrew invited John Rowley to report on the “under the bridge” project on behalf of WREN, prior to commencing the main agenda item

John reported that the “under the bridge” project is progressing.

The first phase of the project was the provision of a mural under the bridge. Third year Castlecroft Primary School children had been involved designing in the mural. It was opened by Mayor Barry Finlay on 16th May

The second phase of the project will be the provision of the furniture including the motor cycle barrier. This will be followed by a third phase which will be the provision of a ramp to improve access to the railway walk.

John said that he would report on future progress at each FCCA meeting.

Andrew thanked John for his update.

3. Presentation of Wolverhampton City Council's Proposals

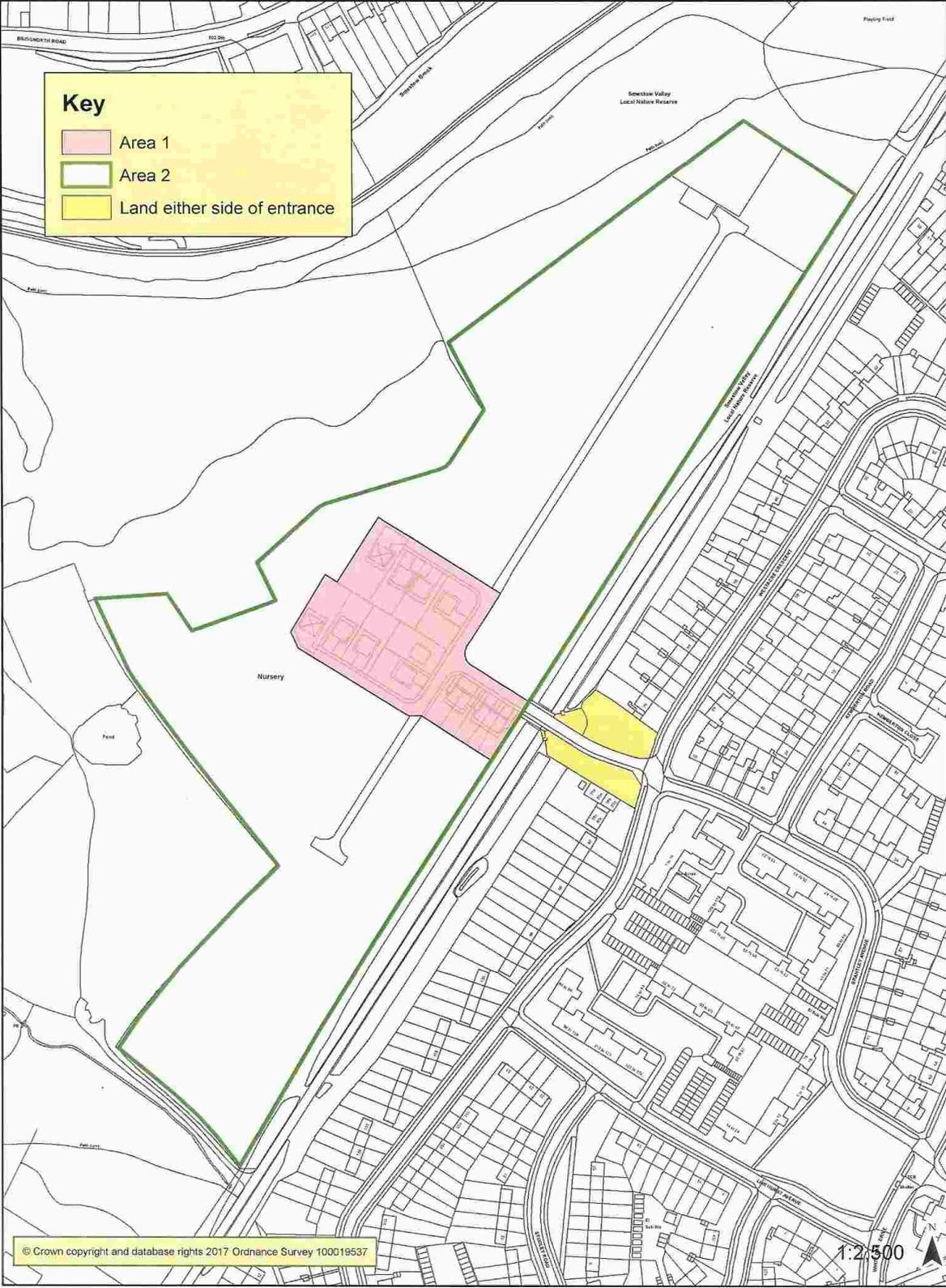
Andrew introduced Alison Fowler, who was representing the Wolverhampton City Council Housing Strategy and Development Department. Alison would present and answer questions on WCC's current proposals for the WEC, assisted by Karen James and Cllr Wendy Thompson.

Alison opened the presentation by saying that following the public engagement meetings held on 28/29th June and 5/7th July last year, she had decided to write a report which included the key discussions and concerns. This report had gone to cabinet on 7th February. The resulting decision had then been fed back to the TDCC and to FCCA.

Alison circulated the two plans below:



On the first plan the proposed housing development would occupy the area shown in grey. The area shown in green would become part of the Smestow Valley Local Nature Reserve (SVLNR)



On the second plan, the area shown in yellow would be open space indefinitely. The area shown in pink would be the proposed housing development. The rest of the area shown within the green line marking the boundary would go become part of the SVLNR indefinitely.

Alison said that a bid has been made for £70,000 of EU funding for the SVLNR as part of a Black Country wide bid for European Regional Development Funds (ERDF). Also, there is Section 106 and Environment Agency money. The total amounting to £285,000 for the SVLNR.

In addition, WCC would use a portion of the capital receipt from the sale of the land, for clearance to open up the WEC site to the SVLNR, for the provision of 8 allotments, car parking and footpaths, and also to go towards management of the meadow areas.

A question and answer session then took place.

4. Discussion and Proposals

Paul Fereday asked Alison to confirm that the land going into the SVLNR would be going in indefinitely. Alison said that it would be indefinitely.

The question of the safety of the ERDF funding post Brexit was asked. Alison said that as long as a grant agreement could be signed pre Brexit, then the money would be safe.

Paul asked what the timing for work on the SVLNR would be relative to the construction of the houses. Alison said that it would take place before and after the housing development.

Paul asked if there would be any social housing in the development. Alison replied that there would not be any social housing as the development would consist of 14 units and social housing only needs to be provided if there are more than 15 units..

Paul asked if the price of the houses could be capped. Alison replied that the price could not be capped.

Andrea Cantrill asked if the developer had been chosen. Alison replied that the developer had not been chosen. Andrea asked for the houses to be environmentally sustainable, commenting that there are developers who will work to this standard.

Cllr Wendy Thompson asked if when WCC sells an asset, it is sold at the best value. Alison replied that it must be sold at the best value.

Alison was asked if Steve Morgan has anything to do with the planned development. Alison replied that Steve Morgan does not have anything to do with the development.

Judith Tanswell asked if the glasshouses would be taken down. Alison replied that they would with the money for the demolition being taken out of the capital receipt for the sale of the land. However, outline planning permission for the houses would need to be given before the glass houses could be taken down.

Alison said that there would be money from the Environment Agency for work in the SVLNR. The existing gates will go into the SVLNR but will be moved from their current location. The section coloured yellow in the second plan will be open space indefinitely. When the site is sold additional funds for the SVLNR can be sought after.

Paul asked why WCC had decided to sell the land at the WEC, when they were brown areas about the City that could be developed. Alison responded that WCC did not have any money and therefore needed to generate funds for the demolition of the glasshouses and in order to open up access to the SVLNR. Alison added that some of the brown area were already being tackled by WCC.

Paul asked if the glasshouses could be put back into use. Alison replied that this could not happen because they had been trashed. Some time back the central plant area had been outsourced and then closed. WCC had worked with Groundworks, providing adult training at the WEC but

Groundworks could not afford to keep going. There was no longer any grant funding and no one else could take the WEC on as a nursery.

Paul asked if the houses would be big houses. Alison said that there would be fourteen family units and that the demolition of the glass houses must take place before the developers would buy the land.

John Rowley said that he would like to return to the subject of Groundworks. He said that the central plant area had originally been in a proper condition. Why did WCC allow it go to neglect and why did they not make Groundworks make it workable? Alison said that there was no point in chasing a charity and that Groundworks had declared themselves bankrupt. John commented that even so they had since popped up in other areas.

Keith Ward spoke of access to the WEC site from Westacre Crescent and asked for road improvements.

Andrea asked Alison to confirm that the remainder of the land occupied by the WEC would go back into the SVLNR. Alison confirmed that 90% of the land would be going back into the SVLNR.

Paul commented that if WCC need to sell the land in order to fund the demolition of the glasshouses, why did they not just wait until they do have the money to fund the demolition?

Paul also asked if any of the money from the sale would be distributed across the rest of Wolverhampton. Alison replied that she did not know. John asked who would know? Alison said that when the capital receipt was received, then an application could be made to ring fence the money for the local area. Paul said that the money would not stay in the local community area. Alison said that she did not know.

Paul commented that the railway walk area is not being looked after and the money that is currently being proposed to be available to the area will not cover it.

Alison said that £285,000 had been allocated already for the SVLR, this is in addition to the money that would be allocated from the capital receipt for the sale of the land.

Cllr Thompson said that the money received from the sale of the land could be in excess of £1,000,000. This and all the grant money currently allocated should go into a trust fund for the SVLNR. She said that green belt land is precious and that Wolverhampton has a very high proportion of built in land. She said that community views are required as they are important.

John said that the SVLNR is a city wide asset and should not be viewed as an FCCA asset alone. He said that it is a green lung and if some land must be lost to building, it must not spread. He asked if it could be guaranteed that no more of the WEC site would be built on. Alison said that the remaining 90% of the land would go back into the SVLNR indefinitely.

John asked whether this development would be the end and would there be a need to protect from further encroachment. He observed that looking at the plans, there would be traffic crossing the WEC site and that this would affect the LNR. He added that careful thought must be given to where the money goes. Alison gave assurance that what is shown on the plans as going into the SVLNR will go into the LNR indefinitely.

Paul pointed out that development is already encroaching into green belt land. He said that development in green belt land is easy money for WCC and a lot cheaper for developers to develop than developing brown field sites. Wolverhampton needs places for young people to go but in brown field sites not green belt land. He said that he could not understand building in the LNR green belt area.

Brenda Bates gave her views summarising that "we are where we are". She said that there had already been four public engagement meetings and that Alison had taken into account all the points raised at those meetings. Brenda said that the Local Neighbourhood Plan wanted the LNR to be owned by the Community. The LNP suggested that part of the WEC should go into the SVLNR, in the latest proposals 90% of the WEC would be going back into the SVLNR. With the current WCC financial situation there must be some compromise and the current suggestion is the best

suggestion for the site under the circumstances. A benefit will be that the SVLNR will become a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC). Brenda added that doing nothing was not an option. The WEC site would not look after itself, it needs to be managed. It would be preferable if there was no building but if it is the only way to raise the required money to look after the site then it is the best option.

Andrea asked if any of the money would be used to improve access to the SVLNR. John asked if there could be funding from WCC and some of the ERDF funding to provide access. Alison said that Dave Purdie had already looked at putting in access paths. Andrea said that access is essential and that the LNR is not disabled friendly at present. Alison said that access must be taken account of. Andrea said that the plan needs to bring in cycling paths. Alison added that the plan would take into account ramblers.

John asked if any of the £285,000 of funding would be spread across Fowlers Park. Alison replied that all of the £285,00 would go into the SVLNR. Cllr Thompson said that she was concerned that if the capital receipt could be in excess of £1,000,000, this also all went into the SVLNR.

Max Taylor said that he was relatively new to the area and asked how long the WEC site had been in a dilapidated state. Alison said since 2012/2013. She explained that the public do not have access to any of the site at present. Under the proposed plans they will have access.

Lesley Leader commented that the issue of the WEC had started as a health and safety hazard that WCC could not put right.

A question was raised about the newts. Alison said that an ecological survey had taken place and the newts and all badger setts had been recognised and would be protected.

A comment was made that the white throats also needed to be protected.

Heather Rous said that she would like to see all the money from the capital receipt kept. She said that the developer should be told that there should be no extensions once the new properties have been built. Heather agreed with Brenda that something must be done, however she wanted Alison to take back to WCC that the deeds must say that permitted development rights have been removed.

Max asked how WCC had arrived at 14 being the number of houses to be built. Alison said that it was based upon the cubic metres available. Max asked why there was no social housing in the planned development. Alison said that this was because the number of units being built was less than the threshold. If the development consisted of more than 15 units, then 25% would need to be social housing. Also, the issue was the lack of public money available to develop social housing on the site.

Paul said that he was not against properties being built as long as they were the right properties. He said children can no longer afford to leave their parents homes. He felt that the price of the proposed properties would be out of reach. Alison replied that they were 2, 3 and 4 bedroomed family homes. There would be 5 with 2 bedrooms and the rest would have 3 or 4 bedrooms.

Cyril Randles wondered whether if the houses were sold on the open market, they could end up in private rental. Alison said that nothing could be done to stop this or to stop multi occupancy. Cllr Thompson pointed out that even so the landlords should be licensed. She said that WCC have recently taken on five enforcement officers.

Andrea spoke of the current good work that was being undertaken redeveloping areas around the canals. Cllr Thompson referred to Bilston Urban Village. Andrea said that local authority housing that had been sold off over the years had never been replaced.

Cllr Thompson said that building design is really important and it does not have to be expensive. Andrea said that Wolverhampton could become a leader in low carbon design building.

Cllr Thompson spoke of the Local Neighbourhood Plan which states that any building needs to be in character with the surrounding area. She said that the TDCC has a group of people who are

involved with looking at planning and she recommended that members of the public could get involved with this group.

Cyril recommended that if the current meeting passed a resolution on the use of the capital receipt money, then this resolution should also include the character of the buildings.

Heather asked if more money would be made without the removal of permitted development rights. Alison replied no.

Paul felt that the developer had already been chosen. Alison disagreed

Brenda pointed out that originally more houses had been planned for the site but this had been reduced as a result of previous public consultations. Heather thanked Alison for having listened and as a result, a substantial green area had been kept. Cyril commented that he was pleased that green areas have been kept and in addition, another major benefit was that the broken down nursery would become part of the wider LNR. Brenda added that it would also be taken into care.

John commented that WCC have not listened to the referendum on the Local Neighbourhood Plan. He said that every time that he has asked about the LNP in relation to development on green belt land in the WEC, Alison has not responded. In the LNP, people did not want to see any development in the WEC. John said that this is being ignored. Why?

Alison responded that she had met with the Steering Group at least four times and had gone through the LNP with them. John asked the members of the Steering Group why the points had been ignored. Heather said that the points had not been ignored, they had been discussed. Ideally, they would like to see no development taking place but they needed to be pragmatic and recognised that they would have to accept a good compromise, as long as it was sympathetic. The LNP wanted the WEC to go into the SVLNR and 90% of it would be. Cyril indicated that it was a good compromise that it provided community use. Brenda said that the site would be a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC) for the public to enjoy.

Paul asked what would happen to the bungalow. Alison said that it would be demolished and replaced with the housing development and allotments.

John said that the LNP stated that there should be no development within ten metres of the boundary of the SVLNR. He said that the Steering Group had negotiated with WCC, ignoring the people who had voted for the LNP. Heather said that they had tried to let everyone know what was being proposed in order to allow them to give their views. Andrew said that there had already been a set of engagement meetings last year. Some were well attended but there was only one person at the last one. Andrew said they were advertised in shops and libraries and on the FCCA website, John had put posters up and WCC had undertaken a mail drop. Alison said that she had organised a letter drop to 300 houses on the Westacre Estate. She read out the list of roads. Paul said that WCC should have gone further. Cyril said that when the planning application goes in there will be further opportunity to publicise. John said that the proposals are going against the referendum and that WCC should be incumbent to advertise a further meeting.

Cyril indicated that 15% of people who were entitled to vote, voted on the LNP and of those who voted 92% were in favour.

Cllr Thompson said that the WEC proposals had gone through cabinet resources and had been flagged as potential housing development. The next stages are applications for outline and then detailed planning permission. It is important that the public are notified more fully at these stages.

Cllr Thompson said that she was concerned about safeguarding the capital receipt for the SVLNR. She asked if those present would agree that all of the capital receipt should be secured for the long term future of the LNR. If so, there would need to be a legal agreement to secure it (for example, a group of trustees).

Alison replied that £285,000 had been allocated in order to get the WEC into the LNR. She said that she could go back and ask for more money to go into the LNR when she knows how much the capital receipt will be.

Max asked what were the next steps and the timescales. Alison replied that outline planning consent would be sought at the beginning of July. Once the outcome is known then the design of the demolition can start.

In summary the steps are:

Planning application,
Demolition,
Surveys,
Sale of Land,
Development

Alison clarified that the £285,000 is not part of the capital receipt from the sale of the land. It is made up of Section 106 money, Environment Agency funding and ERDF funding. This money cannot be allocated towards the cost of the demolition of the glasshouses, it can only go into the LNR.

Cllr Thompson asked how much of the capital receipt will go into WCC finances, given that the money from the sale may be in excess of £1,000,000. She said that the legal department should become involved and assure that the money is secured for the LNR. She said that the views of residents should be stated clearly and noted down.

Cyril suggested that the meeting propose a resolution that the capital receipt should be secured for the LNR. Alison read out the resolution from the minutes of the last public engagement meeting which confirmed this.

Cyril made the following proposals from the current meeting.

1. The net benefit from the sale of the land should be dedicated in entirety and in perpetuity to the Smestow Valley Local Nature Reserve
2. There would be a removal of permitted development rights on the new houses
3. The development would maintain the character of the area

The proposals were seconded by Heather.

A vote was then held on the proposals

Members of the FCCA Committee, members of the TDCC, the representative of WREN and all members of the public voted unanimously in favour of the proposals

Andrew then called the meeting to a close.