



WEC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MEETING (1)

MEETING MINUTES

7:00 pm Tuesday 28th June 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

Tettenhall & District Community Council:

Cyril Randles Pat Powell George Reiss

Wolverhampton SW Neighbourhood Safety:

Jim Smith

Members of the Public:

J Bradshaw	H Marchant	Steve Vanstone
Andrea Cantrill	C Price	Valerie Wood
M Cook	B Rogers	W Swanson
Linda Cox	John Rowley	John Tanswell
Brenda Jevons	J Kemp	G Sanders
William Jevons	S Kemp	

1. Introductions

Cllr Wendy Thompson welcomed all to the first 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).

Alison Fowler, the chairman and committee members of FCCA introduced themselves.

Cllr Thompson asked for a show of hands to indicate the preference for a presentation or discussion to take place first. The majority were in favour of hearing the presentation first.

2. Presentation of Wolverhampton City Council's Proposals

Leaflets describing the proposals and containing contact details for the public to put forward their views to Wolverhampton City Council (WCC) by email or letter were available at the meeting.

Alison Fowler presented the current proposals.

Alison said that there was a need to look at land throughout the City and decide what to do for the future. The former WEC occupies a large area of land on the edge of Wolverhampton. The Housing and Strategy Department of WCC have been reviewing potential for the future use of the WEC. Some of the detail has been proposed and surveys have taken place. Alison said that it is still early days and not much has changed since the meeting was held with FCCA last December. WCC wish to engage with the Community at a very early stage, looking at what fits in with the Community. A bid will be made for EU funding by the end of July as part of a Black Country bid for European Regional Development Funds. 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 and shown on the reverse of the WCC leaflets. She described the green space, allotments, car parking and new footpaths connecting with the wider Smestow Valley Local Nature Reserve (SVLNR). There would be 14 housing units but the rest of the site would be open to the public (at present it is not open to the public).

WCC need to create a sum of money in order to fulfil these proposals. A bid will be made for EU funding by the end of July as part of a Black Country bid for European Regional Development Funds. WCC propose to use £200,000 raised from the sale of land for housing on the WEC, ring fenced for developing and maintaining the WEC site.

Alison said that the 14 housing units would consist of 5 x 2 bed room and 9 x 3 or 4 bed room. None of the houses would be more than 2 storeys. The original plan had consisted of 5 large houses. However, this was changed following discussions with the Tettenhall and District Community Council (TDCC). The sale of the land for housing development is necessary to fund the demolition of the glass houses and to clear the site. 90% of the WEC land would go into the SVLNR but money is needed to tidy the site first.

Alison said that WCC had taken existing policies into account. They have looked at the Local Neighbourhood Plan (LNP) and have no problem with TNP6 (the WEC) or TNP8 (Windfall sites). They have had discussions with the planning authority. Reports on wildlife have been commissioned. The badger setts in the area of the LNR will be protected indefinitely. Discussions have taken place with the Highways department about car parking. A tree survey is being undertaken. Michelle Ross is looking into the site getting Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC) status.

At the end of Alison's presentation Cllr Thompson asked for any questions or comment from the audience.

3. Discussion

John Rowley introduced himself as a local resident and daily dog walker. He said that he had voted on the LNP. He feels that the council's proposals go against the terms and spirit of the plan. He feels that no notice is being taken of the plan and there is a breakdown of trust with WCC over the LNP. John quoted the following examples:

- Building in White Oak Drive and the destruction of trees
- Bungalows in Bagridge Road within 10m of SVLNR
- House building in Compton Park even though the Smestow Valley Birding Group had campaigned about it being too close to the SVLNR boundary
- Building of flats in the Stockwell End conservation area

John said that he feels that the LNP has not had the impact that it should have had. If plans for the WEC go through, the LNP will not be worth anything

Linda Cox said that she agreed with a lot of what John Rowley said. WCC had not been taking the LNP totally into account. The public need reassurance that there will be no more development in the WEC than is currently being proposed. It needs to be watertight. Linda added that the demolition of the greenhouses is needed because they are dangerous. Money is needed to make the site safe and local residents want security in the site.

Alison Fowler said that there would be a covenant/restriction on the land upon transfer of it, when the land was sold to a third party, that the development could only be of 14 units. This would be binding on the sale of the land rather than a planning restriction. Individuals buying the houses would need to ask for planning permission for changes to their own houses, as permitted development rights would be removed.

Bill Jevons, a resident of the Bridgnorth Road, asked how the Black Country wide bid including the SVLNR would be impacted by the EU Referendum. Alison Fowler said that until Britain formerly notifies the EU of its intention to leave, then the bid for funding would proceed. The bid will be made in July. Bill asked how long it would take to know if it had been successful. John Rowley expected this to be by the end of the year.

Valerie Wood, a resident of the Bridgnorth Road said that she thinks that people are over concerned with the impact of the proposed development on the Finchfield side of the WEC. She said that Bridgnorth Road residents can currently see the glasshouses. If the trees are taken down then the development on the brow of the hill will be visible from the canal. The view is not being protected. The view of the LNR actually extends further than is shown on plans. She added that people had paid a premium for the view when they purchased their houses. Cllr Thompson added that the view from the road would also be affected.

Cllr Thompson said that Britain's exit from the EU would be triggered in the autumn. She asked Alison Fowler what would happen if the EU funding was not agreed. Alison said that WCC could always go back to the original plan of selling the land and ring fencing £250,000 for the development and maintenance of the WEC. Cllr Thompson asked what would happen if the sale of the land for development brought in a capital receipt of more than £250,000. Alison said that she could not say how much of the extra would be ring fenced. Linda Cox commented that this was an important point.

Melissa Cook, a resident of Westacre Crescent asked where the money for maintaining the WEC will come from. Alison Fowler said that if it becomes part of SVLNR it will always be maintained as part of the local nature reserve. If the capital receipt option is followed as opposed to EU funding, the capital receipt will be used for the maintenance for at least 10 years.

Judith Tanswell asked what would happen to the site if there was no housing development. Alison Fowler said that she did not know the answer to that question.

Valerie Wood asked if the sale of other sites had been looked at by WCC to fund the work that needed to be done to clear the greenhouses from the WEC (e.g. Martham Drive). Cllr Thompson said that this land was already designated for housing. John Rowley asked if

the sale of the land at Martham Drive could be used as match funding. Alison said that there would not be enough money from Martham Drive as it is a small site and the money was required for woodland management there and for the play area. John Rowley thought that this could still be an option, as could landfill community funds of up to £50,000. The bungalow on the WEC site could be sold for £150,00. Cllr Thompson asked if John knew of any successful landfill bids. John quoted the canal and St Thomas' Church as examples. Linda Cox pointed out that money would still be needed to manage the site even if funding could be found for clearing it. She said that it was all about trade off.

Melissa Cook asked if the new houses would be fenced in and would they be safe. Alison said that it would not be a gated community.

Linda Cox spoke of security issues along Valley Park. She said that a camera was needed. Cllr Thompson said that currently there was no lighting. Local residents are concerned about security. Housing development could give some security.

Linda Cox and John Rowley expressed concerns that drug dealing may take place if car parking was put into the WEC site. Linda said that the car park would need to be locked at night. Melissa Cook backed the idea of installing a camera.

George Reiss of the TDCC commented that if an access road was put into the WEC site, it would cross the railway track which is used by cyclists and pedestrians. The track would no longer be traffic free. George asked if pedestrians would be given priority. Alison said that this had not caused issues before but it could be looked at with the Highways department. George spoke of problems with motor cycles. A barrier would be required to stop them getting onto the railway track from the new access road.

A question was asked by a member of the audience about whether the housing would be council or private. Alison said that it would be private housing.

A resident from Finchfield said that she has an allotment in Compton. She would like to move to one of the new ones on the WEC site if there would be security. She said that she would like to know how to apply for an allotment. There was also the question of how the allotments would be managed. Alison suggested self-management but members of the public should express their preference (self-management or council management).

Steve Vanstone said that he is a local resident and a dog walker. He asked why WCC wanted to develop a green field site. Why could they not just secure it. Alison said that the site would need ongoing woodland management. John Rowley said that people were being trained in woodland management and that woodland does not require intensive management. Linda Cox spoke of the existing management plan for the SVLNR, although there are no longer any rangers. Cllr Thompson said that previously there were four meetings of the SVLNR Advisory Group each year. These are to be restarted.

Cllr Thompson asked Cyril Randles, chairman of the TDCC for his views. Cyril said that the LNP was produced four years ago. At the time the WEC was managed by Groundforce but this ceased some time ago. The preference in the LNP was for a natural site. Cyril said that he did not have a perfect answer but he wants to know what local people think. Some people have said that they do not want the site built on but others think that building on the site could make things safer.

John Rowley asked if the question of whether or not there should be building on the WEC will be put to the people who voted in the referendum for the LNP.

Linda Cox commented on where would the biggest impact be. Would it be the Finchfield Estate? 90% of the land will go back into the LNR. Will the views of the public be weighted? Alison said that she did not know.

Cllr Thompson pointed out that the access roads into the WEC have tight bends and cannot take a lot of traffic.

Linda Cox said that if there are 14 houses and 3 cars to each house, this would mean an extra 42 cars passing through Finchfield Estate to get to the development on the WEC site.

Melissa Cook said that currently dead woods are not being cleared. If the site is not maintained it will not look after itself.

In summary Cllr Thompson said that there are a lot of issues to be taken into account: security, Parking, the LNR, allotments etc. Then there is the question of the EU funding. Will it come forward? She asked if any one felt that there were any aspects not covered during this meeting.

Cllr Thompson asked for a show of hands from those present in the meeting who would not have an issue with the current proposals. A third of those present indicated that they had no issues.

A resident said that the green houses were the issue. He asked why they could not be removed and then a warden be moved into the bungalow to look after the woodland. Alison said that there was not enough money available to do this, Cllr Thompson said that the warden's wages would need to be paid and cost is the bottom line.

Pat Powell raised the question of whether the WEC will set a precedent for what happens at other sites e.g. Pendeford Mill.

A question was asked about why there were so few allotments (8 runs). Alison said that this was based upon a soil survey.

George Reiss said that he had written to several organisations to see if they would be prepared to run the WEC site but he had not had much response. No organisation wants to run the site.

John Rowley thought that it would be viable to rent out the bungalow. Why not approach organisations who may want it He also thought that there could be community involvement to clear the site. Alison said that a survey had been done on the bungalow and it was in a state of total disrepair.

Cllr Thompson said that three more community engagement meetings planned. Linda Cox asked for more people to be present from WCC. Michelle Ross had planned to be here but her son is ill.

Cllr Thompson asked Brenda Bates for her views. Brenda said that the LNP had been written over a long period of time. Huge amounts of work were put into representing the views of local people. There were specific meetings about the WEC. Community facilities were built into the LNP for the WEC. However, times have changed. Currently the WEC is not open. The WCC proposals do give some community use even though some people will be disappointed.

Alison Fowler said that WCC wants to listen. Work has been carried out with the TDCC and FCCA now WCC wants the views of the public.

Andria Cantrill said that people should talk to their neighbours to get more engagement.

Cllr Thompson concluded the meeting asking for people to get involved and for the people that were at the present meeting not to disappear.