



WEC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MEETING (2)

MEETING MINUTES

7:00 pm Wednesday 29th June 2016 at Smestow Community School

FCCA:

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

Wolverhampton City Council Housing Strategy and Development:

Alison Fowler

Wolverhampton City Council Councillor:

Cllr Wendy Thompson

Members of the Public:

Linda Cox
Ian Martin-Harvey
John Rowley
Jan Vanstone

1. Introductions

Cllr Wendy Thompson welcomed all to the second 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.

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 background and current proposals.

WCC have been looking at planning policy and holding discussions with the Tettenhall and District Community Council (TDCC) and Finchfield and Castlecroft Community Association (FCCA).

No planning application has been submitted but feasibility studies have been carried out and ecological surveys have taken place in order to produce drawings of the current

proposals.

Mid 2015, WCC had dialogue with the TDCC about what could be done with the WEC. Proposals were put together based on the state of the site. A wide area was taken into account: local views, the Black Country Core Strategy and the Local Neighbourhood Plan (LNP). In the proposals, 90% of the WEC site will go back into the Local Nature Reserve, allowing access for the public. 10% of the site will be cordoned off for housing development. 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). The sale of the land for this housing will generate the money required to clear the existing site and support woodland management. There will be allotments, car parking and public access (in accordance with TNP6 of the LNP). No money will be available for a community centre or MUGA (Multi Use Games Area) but fencing, gates and access ways will be provided. Identification work has been carried out for badger setts. A tree survey will be carried out and Michelle Ross is looking into the site getting Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC) status.

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.

WCC wish to get public engagement early on in the process. This is the second of four public meetings being held during the next two weeks. The leaflets available this evening, describing the proposals and containing contact details for the public to put forward their views to Wolverhampton City Council (WCC) will also be available at Tettenhall fete on Saturday 2nd July. Anyone in the City may comment on the proposals.

3. Discussion

Jan Vanstone asked how much the land in the WEC would be sold for. Alison Fowler said that she did not know but £200,000 has been identified as a cost to open the land up to the public. The sale could be more than this but must go to competitive tender. Jan said that she is upset that the land is being sold. Jan suggested that money could be obtained from outstanding council tax if it could be collected. Alison said that Karen Hampshire would have to be contacted about this if Jan wanted to take it further.

Linda Cox said that the current proposal was a good compromise.

Alison said that once the remaining 90% of the land was within the local nature reserve it would be protected indefinitely.

Cllr Thompson summarised some of the points from the previous night's meeting. There were queries about whether there should be any building at all, although some people found a certain amount acceptable. The meeting recognised that there are benefits: security, a camera, more people around, allotments, car parking. However, there are also issues e.g. increased traffic. There are a lot of questions but currently not many answers. The EU funding is a risk

Cllr Thompson questioned how much money would be raised from the sale of the land. She said that in her estimate, potentially the sale could bring in £700,000. This was based on the average house value being £150,000, the land cost being 1/3 (i.e. £50,000) x 14 houses.

Alison said that when she writes the reports for council approval she will work out if it will be possible to put in more than the £200,000.

Linda Cox asked for an agreed percentage of the amount received from the capital receipt to be ring fenced.

Alison said that an amount would be ring fenced

Brenda Bates said that following the March FCCA meeting, Cllr Billson had said that money from the capital receipt would be ring fenced. At this point it was felt that this was sufficient. FCCA asked WCC for more time to consider other options for the WEC. Then the match funding came along and in June FCCA decided that they did not want a pause to prejudice the potential for EU funding.

Cllr Thompson asked if Cllr Billson knew how much money could be raised from the sale and did he say that it could all be ring fenced?

Brenda said that there was never any mention of an amount

Cllr Thompson asked for a copy of Cllr Billson's email

Ian Martin-Harvey asked about the EU funding bid. How much money is going to Fowler's Park, the Essington and Wyrley Canal and the Smestow Valley Local Nature reserve (SVLNR).

Linda Cox questioned whether the WEC was being compromised to fund other areas. She said that figures were needed in order for the public to make a decision and questioned whether there was a lack of transparency

Alison said that £250,000 of work needs to be undertaken in the WEC. She agreed to go back to WCC for more information

Ian Martin-Harvey asked if the environmental study was in the public realm. He was told that it was. John Rowley asked for a copy

Jan Vanstone asked why the land at the WEC needed to be sold to raise money. Could WCC sell brown field sites to raise the money required to undertake the work at the WEC. Cllr Thompson said that developers want green field sites because they are cheaper to develop.

Cllr Thompson questioned whether people were happy with the new information about the potential value of the capital receipt that had come to light this evening. Brenda felt that the purpose of the meeting, to discuss the proposals for the WEC was getting lost. She said the new information should be verified and made public.

Linda Cox felt that the EU funding bit had complicated things,

Cllr Thompson reaffirmed her calculation of the potential capital receipt being £700,000 based on the average house value being £150,000, the land cost being 1/3 (i.e. £50,000) x 14 houses. If WCC were putting £200,000 into the match funding, what would happen to the rest, the public must say if they are happy for it to go elsewhere.

Alison Fowler said that if it is ring fenced, all the money must go into the LNR.

Cllr Thompson said that this needed to be guaranteed in black and white.

Heather Rous commented that at some point we must trust what we are being told. FCCA have been assured that all the capital receipt will be ring fenced.

John Rowley said that ring fencing does not work. What is the legal definition of ring fencing?

Heather said that this was the next stage, once people have decided upon what they want with the WEC, then they can watch the money.

Linda Cox pointed out that the wording is important.

Alison Fowler questioned the basis for Cllr Thompson's calculation of the potential capital receipt.

Linda Cox asked Alison to take back the meeting's concerns to WCC about the capital receipt. She also asked that for the next meeting Michelle Ross should provide an explanation of exactly what the request for EU funding was covering

Ian Martin-Harvey expressed his concerns about the impact of the WEC proposals on bats. Alison said that there was no evidence of roosting bats. Ian said that he needs to read the ecology report as he is concerned about the effects of additional light.

Brenda expressed her concerns that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the plans and that the situation was no further forward. She said that what she was wanted to see is what is the best for the WEC. It was a shame that more people had not attended the meeting.

Linda Cox said that the majority of people want to move forward. Cllr Thompson was correct in pointing out the issues. The situation had become more complex because of the prospect of more money coming in. She said that Alison Fowler needed to feed back to WCC the issues that had been raised this evening.

John Rowley questioned whether the consultation had been broadcast sufficiently. The response to this was that the Council announcement went on 23rd June, since then 300 letters had been distributed in the area around the WEC, there had been a press release, the council had put a notice in the Express and Star and there had been posts in Streetlife.

Brenda commented that Alison had done very well to get the meetings organised so quickly at such short notice.

Ian Martin-Harvey said that disabled access to the railway walk either side of the bridge was missing from the plans.

Cllr Thompson said that Michelle Ross from WCC Strategic Planning needs to be present at the engagement meetings

Linda Cox said that she wants to see Alison present the Cabinet Resources Report on the WEC proposals. Alison said that she would speak to Cllr Billson to find out the public and private status of the report

At this point the meeting came to a close