

ST. MATTHEWS AND BIRCHILLS/LEAMORE LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIP

Tuesday 18th January, 2005 at 6.00 p.m.

at the Beechdale Centre, Stephenson Avenue, Beechdale, Walsall

Present

Councillor Tim Oliver (Chairman)
Councillor Mohammed Arif
Councillor Joan Barton
Mr. Terry Edis
Mrs Jane Evans
Inspector Andy Gilbert
Mr. Christopher Jones
Councillor Haqnawaz Khan
Councillor Barbara McCracken
Mr. Aftab Nawaz
Mr. Mejanur Rohman
Councillor Carol Rose

29/05

Introductions

For the benefit of members of the public, Members of the Partnership and officers introduced themselves.

30/05

Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Malcolm Barton, Locally Appointed Partner, Martin Cain, Secondary Head Teacher representative, Tariq Khan, Locally Appointed Partner and Mr. Hilson Carter.

31/05

Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th October, 2004, a copy having previously being circulated to each Member of the Partnership, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

32/05 **Locally appointed partners (LAPs) - Recommendations of selection panel**

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That having considered each application on its own merit, the St. Matthews and Birchills/Leamore LNP agree the appointment of the persons listed below as locally appointed partners (LAPs) for the remainder of the current municipal year:-

Mr. Andrew Moulton
Mr. Musaddique Miah

The locally appointed partners were invited to join the meeting.

33/05 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

Terry Edis, Locally Appointed Partner, felt that the question of declarations of interest and the signing up to the Council's Code of Conduct could be challenged.

It was **agreed** that the Chairman would discuss the issue with the Monitoring Officer.

34/05 **Petitions**

There were no petitions submitted.

35/05 **Public forum**

The Chairman advised that he had received notification that representatives from the Butts Action Group were hoping to attend the meeting to address the Partnership on the future of the Mellish Road church. The representatives from the Butts Action Group had been delayed.

It was **agreed** that in the absence of any other speakers in the public forum, this issue be deferred until such time as representatives of the Butts Action Group are in attendance.

Transforming your space - Update

The report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Tom Briscoe and Gareth Seedhouse were in attendance to address the Partnership on this issue. Tom referred to the work undertaken in the area covered by the LNP and advised Members that the Beechdale Community Housing Association had expressed their concerns about the lack of consultation regarding the Beechdale park project. Tom indicated that he was aware of the lack of consultation and he had, therefore, undertaken a further consultation exercise in and around the site with the result that everyone in the area had been consulted. A total of 224 letters had been sent out but there had not been any responses from anyone who had any concerns about the project, in addition, an advert had been placed on the Council's web site and it was felt that the concerns of the BCHA had now been satisfied. By way of clarification, Gareth advised Members that work at the site was taking place in two phases. The first phase was to remove the old play area and the second phase was the installation of the new grass multi-use games area. In response to a question from the Chairman, Gareth indicated that the seeding process would be undertaken in March, 2005, and once the area was ready, the new area would be installed. Councillor Oliver also asked about the timescales for the culverting of the stream and whether planning application had been made. Tom indicated that this was an issue that would be dealt with by Jo Nugent from Environmental Regeneration. Tom undertook to ask Jo to contact the Chairman on this issue.

Andrew Moulton referred to opening up the site. He pointed out that the land was currently used by drug users and asked what had been put in place to relocate these people. Tom explained that officers would be working alongside the Youth Service on this issue. He added that the main role of his unit was to improve the site.

The view was expressed that the concerns raised were valid and that there was a need to engage with other sections who are responsible for these issues. It was suggested that the drugs co-ordinator, representatives from "Walkways", and also the Youth Service could be invited to address the Partnership on these issues.

Aftab Nawaz asked what was being done to ensure use of the site by local schools. In reply, Gareth indicated that this was the next step. When the facility was available, local schools would be advised that it was there for their use.

Julie Ball suggested that this issue could be linked to the Task Group which the Partnership were being asked to establish later on in the agenda when consideration was given to the Partnership plan.

Resolved

That the above report be noted.

37/05

Physical access audits

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Councillor McCracken made the point that in the Council House, only one door had been adapted to allow automatic opening for disabled access. She made the point that none of the corridors in the Council House had the facility attached to the security doors.

Mr. Moulton made the point that the corporate allocation for 2004/05 amounting to £170,000 was insufficient to do all of the work required. He made the point that the introduction of the legislation had produced a huge influx of court cases.

Councillor Khan asked whether it would be possible to see a full list of all works required to Council buildings under the DDA, together with costings, and also whether the project identified in the schedule to the report was classed as a priority under the legislation.

Members were advised that questions would be addressed by the Council's Access Officer and Members would be informed of the responses in due course.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

38/05

Report of the disability working group

A copy of the notes of the Disability Working Group from a meeting held on 3rd December, 2004, was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Mr. Moulton referred to the discussion at the meeting relating to shop mobility. He made the point that funding bids for shop mobility and also an access audit bid had been made and an outcome was awaited. Councillor McCracken made the point that the working group was an informal meeting but asked for secretarial support for future meetings of the group. Officers undertook to look into this possibility.

Resolved

That the Partnership continue to receive reports from future meetings of the working group.

39/05

Producing the first partnership plan

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Narinder Singh Chumber outlined the report and advised Members that the initial priorities identified within the first partnership plan for the St. Matthews, Birchills/Leamore Local Neighbourhood Partnership were young people, housing, environment, crime and access/delivery of services. He suggested that the grouping of themes should be done on that basis.

The Chairman asked what the timescale for production of the first plan was and asked whether the first plan should be in place by March. In reply, Julie Ball indicated that the plan was a working document but a document would be taken to Council in March identifying the issues for inclusion in the plan. Narinder made the point that both Member and public participation was required. The Chairman endorsed this point and expressed the view that a wider involvement was needed. He asked how local groups were invited to participate and what publicity there would be. Julie advised that this would be done through various channels. Andrew Moulton made the point that there was a diverse community within the area covered by the LNP and expressed the view that all elements of the community, including the blind and disabled, should be involved.

Reverend David Simms, from the Beechdale Regeneration Partnership, referred to the chart on page eight of the draft plan and asked where Beechdale appeared on that list. In reply, Julie Ball advised Members that the neighbourhoods referred to in the schedule were set by the Government. Each area of the LNP would be identified within the Partnership plan.

Aftab Nawaz referred to the involvement of community forums in the preparation of the plan and undertook, with Andrew Moulton, to work on this issue.

Andrew Moulton referred to the suggested themes and asked for clarification on the theme relating to access/delivery of services. It was pointed out that this will relate to access to buildings and services and it was agreed that the theme should be reworded accordingly. The suggestion was made that the housing and environment theme should be merged but it was pointed out that these were two separate issues and that they should be treated as such.

Andrew Moulton asked why older people in Walsall had not been included in the themes. Narinder Singh Chumber pointed out that the priorities had already been identified and that these were initial priorities. He advised the Partnership that the priorities could be varied at a later stage.

Councillor Arif made the point that health was missing from the list of themes. Jane Evans replied by saying that health was an integral part of all of the priorities. The point was made this also applied to environment.

Councillor Oliver referred to the need for community cohesion and in doing so, referred to the existence of a body known as the Beechdale Regeneration Partnership, which was a body very representative of the Beechdale area. They were anxious to improve the Stephenson Square area perhaps through external funding. Reference was also made to the fact that they had produced their own "local improvement plan" and were seeking support from the Council. They had been trying unsuccessfully for four years to get a dialogue with the Council in this issue. The Partnership unanimously expressed their support for this organisation and the work they were trying to do in the Beechdale area and asked that their support be conveyed to the appropriate officer in the hope that this would assist the organisation in obtaining support generally from the Council and achieving their goals.

The Chairman also referred to problems that existed in the Croft Street, Lewis Street and Mary Street area in relation to fly tipping and anti-social behaviour in this area. He indicated that he had done a survey of local residents who were in favour of an alley-gating scheme. The Partnership expressed their support for such a scheme and asked that the Council be advised accordingly.

Following a further period of discussion it was:-

Resolved

- (1) That the Partnership plan be approved and that acceptance of the plan be recommended to Council following submission to Cabinet;
- (2) That details of the workshops to date be used as part of the first neighbourhood plan;
- (3) That there be the formation of task groups to progress the first detail of the neighbourhood plan, as outlined in the report now submitted.

At this juncture the members of the public who wished to speak in the public forum were in attendance.

40/05

Public forum

With the approval of the Partnership, Mr. David Mahoney, of Buchanan Avenue, Walsall and a colleague from the Butts Action Group, addressed the meeting on the condition of the Mellish Road church. Mr. Mahoney advised the meeting of the desire of the Butts Action Group to regenerate the church and bring it back into use as a possible community facility. Members were advised that the condition of the church emanated from problems with limestone workings in the area. The church was now in a terrible state and during the summer, a petition had been drawn up and there had been several meetings of the Butts Action Group. A local newspaper had expressed interest in the future use of the site. Members of the action group wanted to have the site cleared up. In addition, Mr. Mahoney indicated that the group had been trying to save the church for eight to ten years and to bring it back into use as a community facility. He asked for Council support to do this. He advised that the action group did have a scheme for funding but Council approval was also needed.

Councillor McCracken made the point that the condition of the church was an environmental issue and that it was also located at a “gateway” to Walsall. Meetings had been taking place with the Council regarding lottery funding and a report was to be submitted to Cabinet in February. She asked the Partnership to support the action group and to ask officers to investigate the possible future use of the church and possible funding in view of its architectural interest. Mr. Mahoney made the point that the building was in fact a listed building.

Mr. Moulton expressed support for the proposal and suggested possible use of the premises for the youth of the area. He advised that the environmental forum was looking at investing in gateways to the town, and that he would take this back to the Community Empowerment Network to see if they were prepared to give support.

The Partnership expressed their support for regenerating the church and asked officers to investigate possible future uses for the church and possible funding for regenerating the church in view of its architectural interest and its location at a gateway into Walsall.

41/05

Training and development plan

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Carol Brown, Head of Organisational Development, outlined the main points contained in the report.

Members expressed the view that the preparation of the training and development plan was to be welcomed but there was a need to ensure that Members of the Partnership would not be overloaded. In answer to a question by Councillor McCracken regarding funding for the plan, Carol Brown indicated that there was no budget for the plan but details of all of the Councils training programmes were available in the neighbourhood partnership office.

Resolved

- (1) That the LNP note that there are key awareness/training and development issues and that these should be aligned to the Local Neighbourhood Plan;
- (2) That training and development issues be included on agendas for LNP meetings on a quarterly basis.

42/05

Crime and disorder strategy

Helen Turnbull, from West Midlands Police, was in attendance to speak on this issue.

She advised Members that an audit had been completed following extensive data collection and consultation with the agencies such as the LNP, CEN, the MFF and the Disability Forum. From the information gathered, a draft strategy had been compiled.

She advised Members that Government targets had been set at 15% but the target for high crime rates was 20%. Walsall had now set its target at 20% as it is a high crime rated area, this target to be achieved by 2008.

Helen advised Members that the following strategic issues had been identified but these were in no specific order:-

- Acquisitive crime - domestic burglary, vehicle crime and robbery;
- Anti-social behaviour - violent crime, criminal damage, street disorder, prostitution (victims);
- Youth crime - reducing offending levels;
- Fear of crime and vulnerability - young people as victims, domestic violence and race/hate crimes;
- Drugs and alcohol;
- Road safety.

Helen advised the Partnership that the fear of crime had been reduced so far from 81% to 70% but the target was 69%.

She went on to say that the Borough as a whole from 1st April, 2002 to the anticipated date of 31st March, 2005, had achieved a 16% reduction in all crime types, the target being 14%, including violence which was against the national trend which is a 1% reduction. She advised Members that the framework for the strategy would be ready on 24th January and will be taken to the Strategic Board on 25th January. The document would then be sent out for consultation and would be printed in either the first or second week in March. The strategy itself would go live on 1st April.

Mr. Edis asked whether there was the intention to provide update reports on the figures quoted. In reply, Helen indicated that it was intended that there would be an annual audit but update reports on the figures would be provided as they are produced.

Mr. Moulton referred to the vulnerability of disabled people and asked whether there was anything in the strategy about the possible widening of the neighbourhood watch schemes. Helen indicated that this may be incorporated in the element relating to the fear of crime. She indicated that there was a local initiative regarding neighbourhood watch and a "text information initiative" was being piloted. She added that this was a big issue in raising the profile of neighbourhood watch.

Councillor Oliver referred to Community Support Officers linked to the Police and pointed out that funding for this service was running out. He asked if the Police had any comments on this issue. Helen replied that there was a move for Community Wardens to continue. Councillor Oliver stated that for the Beechdale area, the Chief Executive for Walsall Council had indicated that the service would finish in March, 2005, and other areas would also lose their schemes. He made the point that there needed to be a much better network in relation to this issue. Helen undertook to investigate the situation and report back to the Chairman.

Mr. Edis referred to a recent advertisement requesting applications for people to become special constables. In reply, Inspector Andy Gilbert advised Members that there had been an excellent response and this had been particularly successful in the H1 Division.

Resolved

That the presentation be noted.

43/05

Place check

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Julie Ball outlined the contents of the report and gave a brief PowerPoint presentation. She advised Members that it was a community engagement technique and had potential to be used by the LNP to engage the wider community in the LNP process. She advised Members that place check was a nationally recognised method of assessing qualities of a place, showing what improvements were needed and focusing on people working to achieve them. Its aim was to identify a range of issues in specific locations and suggest actions for addressing the issues through asking participants a series of questions. She added that the approach would help drive forward the implementation of action identified in the initial LNP plan and it would provide local engagement and ownership of the plans through Members of the Partnerships delivering place checks in all of the nine LNP areas.

Members were enthusiastic about place check but, in targeting the communities, the point was made that there was a need for data as to where those communities are. Julie Ball advised Members that data was held about existing groups and organisations but one way of extending that data was to go out into the community. She added that she was looking for Members to get that knowledge through place check. Members expressed the view that although place check was a useful tool, there was a need to get things done to progress the plan and there was a danger of overloading those involved in preparation of the plan. Julie made the point that it was up to Members whether they wanted to use it as a tool. She made the point that it was not there to delay the process, it was about communication. She added that it was a good way to reach people and that community engagement was a good way to sustain communities. Narinder Singh Chumber referred to the concept of place check and indicated that it was about consultation and people going out with cameras. He endorsed the point made that it was a way of engaging the community.

Councillor Oliver asked what the next step was in this, to which Julie replied that Members of the Partnership would be invited to workshops on place check.

Resolved

That the St. Matthews and Birchills/Leamore LNP note the contents of the presentation that introduces “place check” and agree to the implementation of the technique to engage the wider community in the LNP process.

44/05

Date and venue for next meeting

It was noted that, subject to confirmation, the next meeting of the LNP would be held at the Central Methodist Hall, Ablewell Street, Walsall on Thursday, 14th April, 2005.

Termination of meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.55 pm.

Chairman:.....

Date:.....