

# AREA FORUM (WEST WIRRAL)

Wednesday, 24 February 2010

## Present:

Councillor

G Ellis (Chairman)

## In attendance:

Councillors

JE Green

G Watt

Lead Officer

Jim Wilkie (Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Policy)

Area Service Co-ordinator

Tracey Smith

Merseyside Fire Service

John Davies

Merseyside Police

Inspector Paul Vickers

Council Officers

Ian Brand (Head of Asset Management), Mike Collins (Community Safety), Carolyn Curr (Head of Corporate Policy), David Green (Director of Technical Services), Howard Mortimer (Head of Special Initiatives Team)

## Apologies

Councillor D Elderton, Councillor J Hale, Community Reps Gary Evans, Cynthia Radford

### 1 **WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair, Councillor Gerry Ellis, opened the meeting and welcomed approximately 70 members of the public to the meeting in West Kirby. He invited members of the forum to introduce themselves. He informed the forum that the meeting was scheduled to finish around 8pm as there had been a drop in session from 2pm, and apologised if the posters advertising this were confusing.

The Chair welcomed two young people, Sophie and Chloe, from the Year 6 School Council of West Kirby Primary School to the meeting, to raise the pupil's concerns and request information, as detailed below, over the proposed Aldi development at the bottom of Bridge Road.

- The school has 300 pupils, resulting in 500 people, including parents, using this busy junction, along with additional traffic created by the new store.
- Was a zebra crossing planned for the junction of Bridge Road and Orrysdale Road and if not, why not?
- How much traffic uses the junction at present and what impact will the Aldi development have on this?
- Was there a need for another supermarket in the area?

They added that many visitors avoid using this junction, such as families in Westbourne Road walking up to Darmand's Green. They confirmed that these issues

had been outlined in a letter to David Green and that they were still waiting for a reply.

The Chairman thanked Sophie and Chloe and asked David Green to respond. The forum and audience gave Sophie and Chloe a round of applause.

David Green thanked Sophie and Chloe for taking the time to come along to the meeting and admired their bravery at coming along and standing up at the meeting. He added that he had not responded to the letter as he knew that they would be raising the issue at this meeting. He confirmed that he was aware of the problems around the junction, and that there had been six accidents in three years up to 1997. Measures were put in place and since then there had been no further accidents, and last year yellow lines were put in to slow traffic down. David agreed to arrange for traffic engineers to carry out counts of children / parents / cars in the area, as the placing of crossings are based on number of vehicles / people using an area. This would be followed up with a meeting at the school to discuss the issues, possible solutions and places for crossings to be sited, probably in about one month. He also agreed to revisit the area after the Aldi has opened to monitor traffic levels and the need for possible need for new measures.

The Chairman added that there had been many calls re: why work had been stopped on the Aldi development.

Jim Wilkie confirmed that there had been a minor issue over the ownership of a small piece of the land, but that he was aiming to get all of the parties together to resolve this.

#### **Minute decision**

**Resolved: That –**

- i. Sophie and Chloe be thanked for attending the meeting
- ii. David Green to arrange for traffic surveys to be carried out at junction of Orrysdale Road and Bridge Road area and to arrange a meeting with the pupils at West Kirby Primary School to discuss issues and possible solutions

## **2 AREA CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT / PARTNER UPDATES**

The Area Co-ordinator, Tracey Smith, presented her report containing the minutes of the meeting on 14 October 2009, and local updates, and asked if there were any amendments or matters arising. None were raised. She added that the report included partner updates and asked the partners if they had anything to add to these updates. The partners confirmed that there was nothing further to add to these.

The Chairman asked the public if they had any comments for the partners,

#### **Minute decision**

**Resolved: That –**

- i. the minutes of the October meeting of the Area Forum be confirmed.
- ii. the Area Co-ordinator be thanked for her report.

### 3 **UPDATE ON FUTURE OF COMMUNITY CENTRES**

The Chairman invited Ian Brand to give an update on the Strategic Asset Review in relation to West Kirby and Hoylake.

Ian confirmed that details of the asset transfer programme for Westbourne and Hoylake Community Centres had been included at the last forum meeting, and that the programme was following Council policy and a consistent approach. A meeting was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009 at the Deputy Chief Executive's Office, with three chairs of Joint Management Committees (JMC) of these community centres, along with the chair of the JMC from Greasby Community Centre, to look at how things could be moved on. Ian confirmed that this was a positive meeting and progress was being made.

Hoylake Community Centre – building condition surveys were carried out on the centre and these were being used as a basis to take forward issues re: work required prior to asset transfer. There was also a need to develop a business plan, so consultants have been introduced to assist with this.

Westbourne Hall – a meeting was held with the JMC following the building condition survey to look at addressing issues re: heating, structure, damp and roof. Further inspections will take place following the agreed works being carried out. Consultants have also been introduced to assist with the development of a business plan.

The Chairman thanked Ian Brand for his update and the following questions / issues were raised:

1. Vaughan Williams, Chair of the Hoylake Community Centre JMC thanked the Councillors and Officers (in particular Jim Wilkie and Ian Brand) for their assistance in moving the asset transfer forward and confirmed that there was a strong urge to take this forward.

2. Sandra Wall – what was happening with Birkenhead Town Hall, as this great asset was not being used?

Ian Brand – this was one of the assets identified as surplus to requirement, and for disposal. The Hamilton Partnership had been chosen, from a short-list of bidders, as the preferred bidder and work was being undertaken with this group to explore a proposed use for the building and bring this to fruition. The Partnership has been given six months to work up a detailed plan.

3. Margaret Campbell – what was the situation re: community asset transfer of allotments?

Ian Brand – confirmed that there was potential for allotments to go through this process. There were two parties interested in the allotments and the Council was looking to explore terms on these.

4. Rosemary Chandler, Secretary of Sandringham Drive allotments – was there any timescale for allotment transfers?

Ian Brand – the sites being considered were at West Kirby and at Hoylake, but that there were no definite dates / timescales set at present.

5. John Brace – are the community centres to be brought up to standard before being transferred?

Ian Brand – confirmed that the centres would be brought up to the standard agreed with the JMCs and in-line with the Council's approved asset transfer policy. The structural surveys highlighted areas requiring further investigation / work.

**Minute decision: -**

Resolved that Ian Brand be thanked for his update

**4 UPDATE ON REGENERATION PROJECTS / PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Chairman informed the forum that there was a written update from Howard Mortimer available at the meeting and thanked him for the report. He added that the following events / developments were good news for the area:

- Return of the Open in 2014
- Women's Open in 2012
- Development of 8 Meols Drive Hotel and spa - Some details of neighbour's concerns where presently being discussed
- Sail/Hotel project - Carpenters (the developers) we had invited to attend the meeting but they declined the invitation
- Kings Gap Court Hotel – new plan submitted for Holiday Inn Express and Marco Pierre White restaurant

Howard informed the forum that his written update was a resume of progress on the regeneration of Hoylake and West Kirby, covering the following:

- Hoylake Station Gateway Project – This £1.2 Million proposal concerns high quality Public Realm improvements of the sort already in evidence in Market Street. The site in-between the station frontage and the Quadrant will require the support of a number of partners including Mersey Travel. Providing the necessary funding can be identified – and this cannot be guaranteed – it is hoped that Wirral's Cabinet will be asked to approve the project for implementation before the return of The Open Championships in 2014. A public exhibition regarding the project will be arranged should it prove deliverable.
- Hoylake and Meols Promenade – The Council continues to seek funding in support of appropriate investment in the Hoylake & Meols Promenade. Following the disappointment of our unsuccessful bid to the CABA Seachange Programme, which targeted a £1M grant towards a phase 1 Hoylake Promenade project, the Council is looking at prospects for an initial 'start-up' project close to Meols Parade Gardens and the Lifeboat Station. This possible action will be informed by Public comment and a special meeting called for this purpose in the spring.
- The Sail – In September 2009 Council's Cabinet agreed that the Council should engage with the developers (Carpenters) and their legal advisors to draw up a development agreement and identify a clear proposal covering precise plans re: parking and a clear stakeholder and public engagement plan.

- Public Realm Improvements – Following a study 3 years ago by consultants W. S. Atkins examining the prospects for high quality Public Realm improvements in central West Kirby, the Council has been pursuing possible external regeneration funding to help facilitate a initial programme of improvements. If the necessary financial resources can be assembled the first phase of work to be targeted could be Dee Lane / Banks Road. Such improvements would concern surfaces, lighting, street furniture, planting and signage.
- Wirral Country Park – Some public funding has already been expended on improving pathways and cycle ways in the Country Park. In respect of a proposed new Visitors Centre at Thurstaston – replacing the existing building – about half the costs of the project have been secured from Wirral Council subject to the achievement of the balance from external sources. Unfortunately, so far, Council Officers have not been successful in obtaining that balance. The Council, however, continues to seek and secure this outstanding balance and is currently pursuing an idea suggested by Cllr. Jeff Green in that regard.

The following questions / issues were raised:

A member of the public asked – was the Hoylake Golf Resort still in the planning stage?

Howard Mortimer – confirmed that this was still in the very early stages and that documents were being prepared inviting expressions of interest in initial terms.

Councillor Jeff Green – raised concern re: the Core Strategy Document over the implications for the Hoylake shopping centre.

Jim Wilkie – confirmed that the Council had a retail assessment carried out by Roger Tym and Partners to look at the condition of shopping areas across Wirral along with scope for further retailing facilities. As part of this exercise the consultants recommended that the descriptions given to shopping areas should be looked at, as terminology has changed. The report also identifies vulnerable shopping areas. No retail areas have been downgraded. Jim offered to discuss this issue in more detail at a future forum meeting and this was agreed by the Chairman and Councillor Green.

Member of the public – what type of environmental agreements have been sought for the proposed Golf Resort site?

Howard Mortimer – the area is within the Green Belt, and as land is in need of remedial action (flood plain / poor agricultural land etc.) this provides an opportunity to improve the area and quality of the land by introducing water features, improved access, localised habitats etc.

Elizabeth Davey– the land that has been identified as high grade agricultural should be protected and kept for agriculture and what is happening on the greater concourse project?

Questions were asked about progress of the greater concourse project. The project includes improvements to all areas, including a new fire station, health centre and retail facilities. But as this involves the Concourse, which is a Council owned building, the project has been passed onto Asset Management to progress.

Ian Brand added that the project was being reviewed and he would be meeting with the Head of Procurement next week to look at whether the procurement exercise is still valid. He agreed to give a further update on this at the next forum.

Eddie Boulton commented on the Council's Core Retail Assessment and felt that it placed Hoylake below Birkenhead and other areas, and asked if the plans for The Open etc. will change this strategy?

Jim Wilkie – apologised if the strategy had confused people, and explained that it was a document setting out a planning framework and not for getting resources. Birkenhead was seen as the main retail centre, and there was no intention to downgrade any of Wirral's retail areas. The aim is to adopt a hierarchy of centres which is more consistent with national policy advice and therefore to strengthen their protection. The document looks at prospects for the next 20 years for future retail provision. He agreed to discuss this in more detail at the end of the meeting.

John Hutchinson – The Core Strategy Document which he felt was ill-presented and resembled a Green Paper, included an objective to reduced dependency on retail jobs , but more retail areas are being planned.

Jim Wilkie –development frameworks are set out under Central Government guidance, and the Core Strategy was complimented by the Planning Advisory Service. The proposed objective in the Core Strategy to reduce dependency on jobs in retailing is not inconsistent with consulting on options to accommodate future retail growth: the Council is looking to increase increasing employment levels across the Borough. The Golf Resort opportunities and the return of The Open has been widely welcomed by the public and elected members. The aim is to build on this opportunity and look at how we can drive / improve our local economy. There are a range of issues, such as bio-diversity and the greenbelt, but we are trying to realise the asset whilst respecting the local environment.

Margaret Campbell – what is the timeframe for the Carpenter progress consultation re the Sail project?

Ian Brand – The Cabinet did not place an end date on this, but we are looking to start negotiations on this as soon as possible.

Councillor Geoffrey Watt – Is there any significance re: dates in the Forward Plan re: the Sail Project?

Jim Wilkie – the Forward Plan is an advance notification of when officers anticipate reporting back to elected members, and officers work towards these dates. The dates are not guaranteed..

John Brace – the cycle path was not continuous and involved returning to the road for the last Open – will this be improved for the next Open?

Jim Wilkie – now that we have confirmation of the Open events a process re: logistics will be launched, and this will be discussed in more detail at a future forum.

The Chairman added that the local Councillors would ensure that consultations similar to those that took place for the last Open event (14 events took place) will allow everyone to have their say..

Member of the public – what was happening to the former toilet block at Hoylake Promenade?

Howard Mortimer – a helpful meeting has been held with the Development Control team and it was hopeful that the developer Mr Watson would be able to start on site in early Summer.

A member of the public – what is the situation re: the management of Ashton Park? He alleged that there had been no representation at the forum from Parks and Open Spaces since 2002

Chairman – Martin Harrison, the Vice Chair of the Park, has been involved with the gateway review, as well as Wirral's Parks Friends groups (he added that he was disappointed that the allotments groups had not been included in this). Part of this includes looking at outsourcing maintenance to the gardens by 2011. He admired Martin's work and added that Jim Lester has attended many forum meetings, but agreed to request a representative from Cultural Services to attend the next forum meeting.

Brigitta Muller – asked if someone from the Youth Service could attend the next meeting to give an update on West Kirby Youth Club?

Jim Wilkie – confirmed the Area Co-ordinator would invite a representative of the Youth Service to the next meeting.

Inspector Paul Vickers added that discussions had taken place with the Youth Service and that the intention was for the centre to be used six nights a week for pre-arranged meetings. Therefore the use of the centre would be much more controlled.

Councillor Jeff Green – the minutes of the last meeting were not accurate, and the issue raised was that the way the Council communicates was not good enough. There needs to be better involvement with the community, and this was being discussed in some depth. Cllr Green had already shared some views with Jim Wilkie

Marko Muller – Why do we need a further hotel that everyone is complaining about when there will be a boutique hotel in Meols Drive?

Howard Mortimer – the proposed hotel development still has to receive planning approval.

John Hutchinson – what progress has been made re: negotiations between lake users, the Council and the preferred developer, as believe the planned meeting had been cancelled?

Howard Mortimer – a meeting took place several weeks ago and progress has been made. A second meeting was arranged, but this was postponed and is due to take place in about 10 days.

**Minute decision:**

**Resolved that: -**

- (i) Howard Mortimer be thanked for his update
- (ii) Howard Mortimer to update the forum on development on the regeneration of Hoylake and West Kirby, and to advertise / invite forum to any public consultations arranged on the regeneration projects
- (iii) Jim Wilkie to arrange for a detailed discussion to be held on the retail assessment at a future forum meeting
- (iv) Ian Brand to give an update on the greater concourse project at the next forum meeting
- (v) Jim Wilkie to arrange for discussion on logistics / plans for the Open event at future forum meetings
- (vi) Tracey Smith to invite a representative from Cultural Services to the next forum meeting
- (vii) Tracey Smith to invite a representative from the Youth Service to the next forum meeting

**5 DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chairman asked for views on the drop-in session prior to the meeting and whether this should be held at a future meeting, within the Hoylake area.

Brigitta Muller – thought it was a good idea, but felt that there should have been more representation from Council departments - e.g. the Youth Service.

The Chairman agreed to ask Officers to look into this and invite more departments along to the next open event. He confirmed that the next area forum would be held on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010, thanked the minute taker and everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.30pm.