Your Community, Your Voice

Record of Meeting and Actions

6:00 pm, Thursday, 18 November 2010
Held at: Granby Primary School, Granby Road, Leicester LE2 8LP

Who was there:

Councillor Nigel Porter

INFORMATION SHARING – 'INFORMATION FAIR' SESSION

The following information stands were sited in the room. Members of the public visited the stands and were given an opportunity to meet Councillors, Council staff and the local Police and to bring enquiries and raise and issues.

Ward Councillors and General Information Members of the public were able to talk to their local Councillors or raise general queries	**Police Issues** The Local Police were present to address issues and answer general queries
Aylestone Local Action Group Members of the public were able to find out about the work that this Group was doing in the area	**The Spark Children's Art Festival** Members of the public were able to find out about the open minded play space on Aylestone Meadows
Lansdowne Children's Centre Members of the public were able to get an update on the children's Centre on Knighton Lane	**Neighbourhood Watch** Members of the public were able to find out about this scheme

At the conclusion of this informal session, members of the public were invited to take their seats and take part in the formal session of the meeting.

58. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Porter was elected as Chair for the meeting.

59. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Chambers and from Brian Davison and Sue Eccle.

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors were asked to declare any interest they had in the business on the agenda, and/or indicate whether Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

Councillor Porter declared a personal interest in minute 62, "Football Pitch Proposals on Aylestone Meadows", as he was a member of the Aylestone Meadows Appreciation Society and had encouraged people to write to the Council with their concerns about the football pitch proposals and had circulated literature about the proposals.

He also declared a personal interest in minute 65, "Community Meeting Budget", as he had been involved with both the Aylestone Local Action Group and the Gilmorton Development Group.

61. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

In response to a question, Councillor Porter explained that there had not been an Aylestone Community Meeting since March because Councillor Mrs Chambers had not been well throughout the summer. (She had hoped to be at this meeting, but was not well enough to attend.) However, work had continued during this time, (for example, a consultation meeting recently had been held and the planters for which funding was approved at the last meeting had been installed.)

The meeting recognised the reason for the gap, but expressed some concern that this meant that budget applications that had been received since March had not been considered. Councillor Porter explained that Ward Councillors were able to consider applications for less than £500 and they did not have to be reported to the Community Meeting, (although they often were reported to enable the community to consider as many of the applications as possible).

AGREED:

that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2010 be approved as a correct record.

62. FOOTBALL PITCH PROPOSALS ON AYLESTONE MEADOWS

Councillor Porter introduced this item, explaining that a representative had hoped to be present from the Environment Agency, but had been unable to attend. The following people then introduced themselves:-

- Neil Croft – Clear Ecology;
- Ian Hollis – Project Manager (Construction)
- Mark Laywood – Leicester City Council (Sports Project Manager);
- Sam Peppin Vaughan – Leicester City Council (Planner – Case Officer); and
- Mike Richardson – Leicester City Council (Head of Planning Management and Delivery).

a) Mark Laywood

Mark Laywood explained that the Council had had an on-going sports development project across the City for the last few years. This already had been delivered on 8 sites and 3 were near to completion, including the Aylestone Recreation Ground. Aylestone Playing Fields was a site on which the football "family" all agreed that football had been played for a long time, although recently there had been a migration away from it. This included the use of football pitches outside the City. It therefore had been decided to try to bring it back in to football use.

It was noted that the Council had been working on this project with various internal and external consultees, including the Aylestone Meadows Appreciation Society, and it was now at the stage that only final approval was needed to enable the project to be delivered.

b) Neil Croft

Neil Croft explained that he had been working with the Council on this since the start of the project. His company, (Clear Ecology), had been appointed to do ecological scoping surveys of all the sites identified.

The first of these was a Phase 1 habitat survey. This gave an ecological overview of the site and considered what protected species were on the site. However, the limitation of this survey was that it did not consider any inter-relationships, only whether species were protected. This survey included consideration of species present due to the flooding of part of the site and the potential effect on bats of the proposed floodlights.

Clear Ecology also undertook a feasibility study, to consider the ecological value of the higher ground. A lot of this study had been desk-based, as well documented evidence already existed from previous assessments of the higher ground. This found that the higher ground was of low ecological value, due to it having been grazed by horses.

As a result of this work, the company presented a report stating that there were implications from the proposed development for protected species, but that there were various ways of addressing these, (for example, by relocating certain species).

Clear Ecology then was asked to do a full survey of the site, which included consideration of things such as the quality of the site, which protected species were found there and watercourses. Unfortunately, this survey had to be carried out under sub-optimal conditions, which raised questions about its accuracy. The survey was subsequently re-done to an optimal time frame and had identified issues that needed to be addressed, such as the presence of grass snakes on the site, the potential impact of floodlights on bats, and the impact of the development on badgers and otters.

From the full survey, it was evident that compensation for the development needed to be provided. Therefore, biological enhancement sites were being considered, to form "corridors" through the development, along with land that could be used in "compensation". It was recognised that there was little value in identifying land at some distance from the site and offering that in compensation, as compensatory land needed to offer a continuation of the green area.

It was emphasised that Clear Ecology's role in this process was to provide the surveys required. It had no view on whether the development could be done.

c) Mike Richardson

Mike Richardson then explained that, when a planning application was submitted, it went through various processes, including consultation, (for example, with statutory bodies such as the Environment Agency), and publicity of the proposals. Planning officers were required to consider whether the development could take place without conflict. This meant that, if the proposals would have a serious impact on the public, the development should not proceed. In addition, use of the land for recreational purposes did not require planning permission, so the elements that it was needed for were the "hard" areas, (the car park, club house, artificial pitches and floodlights).

The site under consideration was in a "green wedge". This classification meant that activities not supporting this status should only be approved in exceptional circumstances. Sports and ancillary activities were felt to be in keeping with the area being a green wedge. However, the area also was in a flood plain and was a designated nature reserve, which had to be considered in conjunction with the over-arching principle of letting people access sport and/or a healthy lifestyle.

During the processing of the planning application, the need for the surveys described by Neil Croft had been identified, (see above). The applicant's response to these was awaited, as were comments from the Environment Agency on flood risk. When these were received, consideration could be given to whether planning permission could be granted.

d) General

Maps of the area being considered were circulated and the Chair opened the discussion to the meeting. During this, the following comments and answers to questions were presented:-

- The applicants were Leicester City Council's Director of Culture and Director of Regeneration, Transport and Highways. They were required to follow the same processes as anyone else applying for planning permission;

- The site affected by this application was an area of approximately nine acres, on the right-hand side of the playing fields, on Braunstone Lane East, although the actual area to be developed still had not been confirmed. The hard standing would be on the area currently used for grazing horses;

- The reports on environmental considerations effectively became part of the planning application. As such, all consultees saw the reports and were able to give feedback on whether they considered them to be correct and/or adequate;

- Consultation with the public over this application appeared to have been minimal. For example, the Aylestone Meadows Appreciation Society had only been consulted in May 2010, which it felt was too late for any comments to be taken in to account;

- Approximately formal 350 objections to the proposals had been received to date, although over 2,000 objections had been recorded on a Facebook site;

- Provision of football facilities was important, and the Council was improving facilities for good reasons, but a lot of facilities for football already existed and it needed to be recognised that people attached importance to other sports as well. Aylestone Meadows currently could be used for a wide range of healthy activities and was part of the City's heritage;

- This application only affected a small proportion of the nature reserve, but these areas needed to be reserved for nature, even if they were of low ecological value;

- A number of funding packages would be used for the development of 11 facilities across the City under this project. It was anticipated that the development of the Aylestone Meadows site would cost approximately £2.4 million;

- This project was the first in the country to receive this type of funding from the Football Foundation, as it previously had only supported individual projects. This project now would be used as a national template;

- It was of concern that the environmental site surveys undertaken could only consider wildlife on the application site, not the Meadows in general. This did not appear to be in keeping with the City's environmental policies;

- Before work started on site, exclusion fencing would be put up to prevent wildlife moving on to the development site;

- If protected species were to be moved, they could end up restricted to small pockets of land in certain areas. The area to be developed therefore should be identified in relation to the needs of wildlife, as well as potential users of the site;

- Problems already were being experienced with the speed of traffic on Braunstone Lane. There was a 30 miles per hour speed limit, but very few vehicles observed this and, as the road had a lot of bends, it made it a dangerous road. This development could result in an increase in traffic;

- All planning applications included a transport statement which, amongst other things, considered the potential increase in activity. The Highways Authority had raised no objection to the proposals relating to this application, as there already was a maximum of 15 pitches on the site and the application only sought to increase this by two;

- In determining whether a planning application could be approved, consideration had to be given to whether the development was in the public interest, which was not the same as public opinion;

- Some roads within the site in question were prone to flooding. As the applicant, the City Council was required to do a flood risk assessment, including how all problems with flooding would be overcome. The assessment had to be acceptable to the Environment Agency and it was unlikely that, if the application was passed to the Secretary of State for determination, he would go against the recommendation of one of the government's own agencies;

- The City Council was duty bound to ensure that the levels were correct for the hardstanding, to ensure that it did not flood;

- It was questioned why this site had to be used, rather than a different site elsewhere in the City. In reply, it was noted that the Football Foundation had considered a number of sites across the county when developing the original Football Strategy, but Aylestone Meadows was the largest football site owned by the City Council;

- There appeared to be a disparity between choosing Aylestone Meadows for development because of its size and submitting an application that only proposed to develop five football pitches, two of which would have artificial surfaces, and ten changing rooms. A development of this size could be located elsewhere;

- Each changing room proposed could accommodate 2, 3 or 4 teams of smaller numbers;

- The way in which football was played had changed a lot. For example:-

    a) football governing bodies now allowed staggered start times of matches;
    b) some teams travelled to matches already changed, so they could arrive ready to play; and

c) in the county there was a move to sanction playing more games on artificial pitches;

- There was no intention to exclude anyone from accessing any areas of the site. The pitches with artificial turf would have fences round them, but it was not intended to fence any area of Aylestone Playing Fields. The floodlit pitch would have a hit rail around it, but this was not a fence;

- The possibility of locating the changing rooms on the raised land in the third of the three fields included in the site had been considered. However, that land was owned by Blaby District Council and the Football Foundation, which was the main funding body, was not happy about the facilities being located there, as there only would be room for 3 or 4 pitches. In addition, access would need to be through a residential area;

- Consideration also had been given to developing the Riverside Business and Enterprise College site, but this had not been pursued for a number of reasons. For example, if hardstanding was installed at Riverside, but teams wanted to play on grass, they would have to cross a main arterial route and adverse weather could make the route difficult to negotiate;

- Aylestone Park Football Club had been relocated to the Mary Linwood Playing Fields, so that its original site could be used for an extension to the Saffron Hill Cemetery, which meant that the land was not available for this development;

- The Football Foundation had very strict specifications for changing facilities, such as the amount of space, or the number of rooms, needed per person and the need for a referees' room. These were reflected in the application made;

- It had been reported that the objections to the project made by Natural England had been removed. However, they still had various concerns; for example, the buffer zones appeared to have been misrepresented, about the way that the various surveys had been undertaken, and that the development would "sterilise" the area of wildlife. In reply, it was noted that a lot of discussion already had been held on the representations received from Natural England and when the project was finalised they would be consulted again;

The following points were made in support of the development and the process followed:-

- Consultation reports were prepared following strict guidelines;

- The City was fortunate to be receiving this funding, as a large amount was being provided in return for a very small contribution from the City Council; and

- Those who wanted to play football needed somewhere to do so, so this proposal should not be rejected.

In order to proceed to the other items on the agenda, the Chair suggested that further questions and/or comments about this development could be sent to him.

Forms were available on which comments could be made, but it was not a requirement that they be used.

The Chair then thanked all present for their contributions to the discussion and for the polite and informative way questions and comments had been made and answered.

The meeting adjourned at 8.14 pm and reconvened at 8.17 pm

63. CHILDREN'S PLAY FACILITIES IN THE AYLESTONE WARD

Anna Barradell, Play Co-ordinator with Leicester City Council, introduced herself to the meeting.

The meeting drew attention to the open space project that had been undertaken on Aylestone Meadows, near the “pebble beach”. Assurances had been given that the planting there would be in keeping with the nature reserve status of the area and appropriate for the wildlife in the area. However, the plants used were “back garden” varieties, which were dangerous to wildlife. In addition, it had not been watered, so a lot of them had died.

Anna Barradell apologised for this and for the length of time it had taken to resolve the situation. It had now been agreed that the area would be cleared up and the correct varieties of plant provided. She further explained that:-

- An area such as this would only be planted to enhance it;

- The area had been created to blend in to the natural habitat and to let children and young people engage with the natural environment through activities such as creative play; and

- This was a new idea, so the area was not greatly used at present, but it was hoped that sessions could be held to show how the space could be used.

It noted that children from Granby Primary School had been involved in planting at the site. This already was encouraging a greater number of children to use the area, both through the school and recreationally.

It also was noted that it was intended to improve the area with things such as signage. For example, the hedging needed interpretation to relate it to heritage and crafts.

In response to a question, Anna Barradell advised that she was not aware of any plans to reinstate the children’s play area on Aylestone Meadows. However, she would advise her colleagues of the interest that had been expressed in this being done.

64. POLICING UPDATE

PC Dave Robinson, Leicestershire Constabulary, introduced himself to the meeting and gave an update on policing in Aylestone:-

- Crime was down by just over 11% in general. Further statistics could be found on the Police website;

- The local Police had been working a lot with the community, especially young people, and recorded anti-social behaviour had reduced. PC Robinson advised that the Police would be interested to hear if this matched people's experiences; and

- There had been some issues with licenses for the sale of alcohol in a number of shops. One shop had had its license revoked, one had received a financial penalty and one had had a condition added to its licence whereby only the owner could sell alcohol. These actions had led to a reduction in alcohol-related problems.

In reply to a question, Sergeant Andy Partridge, Leicestershire Constabulary, advised that he was unaware of anti-social behaviour issues arising in Gilmorton Avenue. Police reports did not indicate an increase in anti-social behaviour, or crime in general, in that area, so it would be useful if the Police could be made aware of any issues.

Concern was raised about the number of people turning right out of Old Church Street, which was a prohibited manoeuvre. There was concern that accidents could be caused, particularly as people often came down Granby Street at great speed, which also made the pedestrian crossing dangerous to use.

PC Robinson advised that the Police needed to see people making this turn in order to be able to take any action against them. One option could be to target users of this junction in general, as there also had been reports of people turning left and then using someone's driveway to turn round and travel in the opposite direction.

Other suggestions for how this could be addressed were made as follows:-

- The height of the kerb could be raised, or the angle of the corner made more severe, to make it harder to turn;

- Users of this junction could be targeted and the number of people misusing the junction reported in the Leicester Mercury;

- A post could be placed on the pavement so as to prevent people turning right;

Sergeant Partridge undertook to consider this request and the options suggested, and to report back to the next meeting on what action could be taken. The meeting agreed that it would be useful for a representative of the Highways Authority present at future meetings, to enable proper consideration to be given to issues such as this.

Action	Officer Identified	Deadline
Report to be made on what action can be taken to prevent drivers misusing the junction of Old church Street and Granby Street	Sergeant Partridge, Leicestershire Constabulary	Next meeting
A representative of the Highways Authority to be asked to attend future meetings	Jerry Connolly	Next meeting

65. COMMUNITY MEETING BUDGET

a) <u>Act Up Young People's Theatre Company</u>

RECOMMENDED:

that the application for £1,436 from the Act Up Young People's Theatre Company to develop the theatre be refused.

b) <u>Saffron Fete</u>

NOTED:

that the application for £567 from Saffron Community Enterprises Ltd towards the Saffron Fete held on 21 August 2010 could not be considered, as it was not possible to consider applications for funding retrospectively.

c) <u>Committee Start Up Funds</u>

AGREED:

1) that a grant of £150 be supported from the Ward Community Fund to Gilmorton Development Group towards the cost of stationery, room hire and refreshments at the Group's committee meetings; and

2) that the Gilmorton Development Group be advised to consider other funding sources for the provision of seating at the ball park and the purchase and installation of litter bins, but if no funding is available from other sources, a further application for funding will be considered by this Meeting.

Action	Officer Identified	Deadline
Gilmorton Development Group to be advised to consider other funding sources for the provision of seating at the ball park and the purchase and installation of litter bins	Jerry Connolly	As soon as possible
If no funding is available from alternative sources, a further application to be made to this	Jerry Connolly	As needed

meeting if wished by the Gilmorton Development Group		

d) <u>Dance Tracksuits</u>

The meeting was advised that the S.T.A.R.S. Freestyle Dance Academy had applied to this meeting for funding for these tracksuits as there was a strong representation of young people from Aylestone amongst the group's membership. The Academy currently had no venue, so it was hoped that the tracksuits would help establish a sense of identity for the young people involved. Checks had been made and this was not a commercial organisation.

AGREED:

1) that a grant of £480 be supported from the Ward Community Fund to the S.T.A.R.S. Freestyle Dance Academy towards the purchase of dance tracksuits; and

2) that the Academy be asked to confirm whether the track suits will be kept by each member, or whether they will be available for use in the future by other members.

Action	Officer Identified	Deadline
The S.T.A.R.S. Freestyle Dance Academy be asked to confirm whether the track suits will be kept by each member, or whether they will be available for use in the future by other members	Jerry Connolly	As soon as possible

e) <u>Carols in the Park 2010</u>

AGREED:

1) that a grant of £380 be supported from the Ward Community Fund to the Spirit of Aylestone Community Group towards electricity supply costs, the hire of a PA system, a donation to St John's Ambulance and refreshments for the 2010 Carols in the Park event; and

2) that the Spirit of Aylestone Community Group be requested to use a more sustainable model for the event in future years, to reduce its reliance on the Ward Community Fund.

Action	Officer Identified	Deadline
The Spirit of Aylestone Community Group be requested to use a more sustainable model for the Carols in the Park event in future years, to reduce its reliance on the Ward Community Fund	Jerry Connolly	As soon as possible

f) Improvements to the Aylestone Shopping Area

AGREED:

that the application from the Aylestone Local Action Group for funding for a project to improve the locality of the shopping area around Aylestone Village be deferred to enable further discussions to be held with the Ward Councillors.

g) Community Composting

It was noted that, since the agenda had been circulated, an application for funding had been received from the Eyres Monsell Allotment Society for the construction of bays for the composting of green material generated on site. Details of this application were tabled at the meeting.

The meeting noted that this Society met in Aylestone.

AGREED:

that a grant of £1,360.80 be supported from the Ward Action Plan budget to the Eyres Monsell Allotment Society for the construction of bays to contain the areas for composting green material.

h) Welford Road Local Policing Unit – Neighbourhood Action Team Plain Vehicle

It was noted that, since the agenda had been circulated, an application for funding had been received from the Welford Road Local Policing Unit's Neighbourhood Action Team for funding towards the hire of a plain vehicle for use by the Team.

Details of this application were tabled at the meeting, but it was noted that, since the application had been received, the Police had decided that, due to the success of the plain vehicle, it now would be fully funded by the Police. As such, the application was withdrawn.

66. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8.58 pm