

Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields Community Meeting

Your Community, Your Voice

Record of Meeting and Actions

5:00 pm, Tuesday, 14 February 2012

Held at: Braunstone United Reformed Church, Gooding Avenue

Who was there:

Councillor Michael Cooke

Councillor Anne Glover

Councillor Wayne Naylor



Leicester
City Council

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 service representatives:-

- **Clockwise Credit Union**
- **Police Issues**
- **City Warden**
- **Neighbourhood Housing Office**
- **Citizens Advice Bureau**
- **Advice on Winter Heating**
- **Ward Councillors and General Information**

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.

39. FILMING OF MEETING

The Chair advised the meeting that a request had been received from a student to film the proceedings of the Community Meeting. All present were asked if they agreed to this. No objections were raised, so the meeting was filmed.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

No such interests were declared.

41. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2011 were approved as a correct record.

42. BRAUNSTONE HALL

The Chair introduced Sir Peter Soulsby, the City Mayor, to the Meeting.

Sir Peter explained that he had had early discussions with the Ward Members about issues in the Ward, so was aware of local issues of concern. He had been very impressed by the Action Plan for the Ward and considered that it could become a model for other Wards.

Sir Peter advised the meeting that he was aware of concern about finding a suitable use for Braunstone Hall. He shared this concern, as it was recognised that the Hall was important to the history of Leicester, as well as the area, and he made the following points:-

- Although there were issues with the building, it was structurally sound and most of the problems were superficial. However, care needed to be taken to ensure that the building did not deteriorate further;
- Better use could be made of the stable block;
- Two parties initially had expressed an interest in the Hall, but it was felt that there now was only one party with a serious interest in the property. They were interested in using the Hall for the leisure and hospitality industry;
- The interested party had a proven track record of using sensitive buildings well, but the cost of any scheme could be a problem. It could be too expensive for the new user to meet the full costs of making the building usable, so the Council was negotiating the level of help it could give. There was confidence that agreement could be reached;

- Negotiations also were underway on how public access to the grounds could be maintained;
- It was hoped that all negotiations could be concluded by the summer; and
- The Council originally had considered funding development of the Hall by selling some land at the corner of Oswin Road, but it was felt that it would be a shame to do this, as the land had ecological value. This sale also would complicate the issues involved in bringing the Hall back in to use and the land had no relationship to the site of the Hall. Funding for this development should be clear and straightforward.

The following points were then made in discussion:-

- The possibility of selling land at the corner of Hinckley Road and Winstanley Drive had not been considered. It was part of the school site, so did not link naturally with Braunstone Hall. A strategic objective in the Ward was to develop land for housing whenever possible and the land on this corner was the second prime site in the Ward;
- The development being considered was very exciting and would give the Hall a sustainable future. Detailed plans had not been seen by the Council yet, but any development would need to be done in a way that was satisfactory for the building and the community;
- The Council was aware that public opinion was that the worst option for the Hall would be for the developer to do something that shut local people out, so would be robust in its negotiations with the developer on that aspect of his plans. However, he had always stated that there would be a level of community use;
- The Hall would be leased to the developer, so the Council would retain ownership of the site;
- The Council had worked successfully with this developer in the past and was confident that it could do so on this occasion. Previous examples of the developer's work included the City Rooms, Belgrave House and the large house in Western Park. All had been developed differently. However, the meeting still had some concerns that access to Braunstone Hall would not be maintained;
- There currently was no fence round the area, but if people were using the Hall, it could help security if one was erected;
- An important consideration in current negotiations was ensuring that whatever was provided at the Hall was affordable for the community. Better use could be made of the stable block, which could help with the provision of affordable facilities;
- The Council wanted appropriate facilities to be provided for community use, alongside the development of the Hall. For example, a café could benefit from

passing trade and provide a useful facility. It was important that the community endorsed such facilities, as it then was more likely to use them. The stables and gardens would not be part of the area leased to the developer, which gave good opportunities to provide facilities;

- The potential for vandalism would be reduced once the Hall was in use;
- It was suggested that a check could be made to see if the large Cedar tree at the rear of the Hall had a Tree Preservation Order on it, but it was noted that the Council could not place such Orders on its own trees;
- The City Mayor undertook to come to the Community Meeting to explain what was happening with the development if an agreement had not been reached by early summer;
- The Council was fully aware of the condition of the Hall and was keeping it wind and water-tight. The potential developer had asked the Council to ensure that the roof was in good condition and it was anticipated that this would be checked within the next two months. The developer would be doing his own surveys as well;
- It was not possible to make detailed plans at this stage, but it was anticipated that, if agreement could be reached before the summer, it would be approximately 6 – 12 months before the redevelopment was started. This allowed time for approvals such as detailed planning permission and listed building consent to be obtained;
- The Council preferred not to enter in to some kind a profit-sharing arrangement for this project, as it would complicate arrangements for the use of the Hall. However, this option could not be ruled out completely;
- Part of the reason for the condition of the Hall was that it had been in a poor condition when it was transferred from County Council ownership to City Council ownership, but it was recognised that it had taken too long to find a use for the property.

Action	Action by	Deadline
If the development of Braunstone Hall has not been agreed by the early summer, the City Mayor to attend the Community Meeting to explain why	City Mayor	Early summer

43. PRINCE'S TRUST

It was noted that, as no-one from the Prince's Trust was able to be at this meeting, this item had been deferred to the next meeting.

44. CHOICE ADVICE SERVICE

As no-one from the Choice Advice Service was able to come to this meeting, consideration of this item was deferred.

45. WARD ACTION PLAN UPDATE

NOTED:

- 1) that it was proposed to bring an annual report on the Ward Action Plan to the next meeting;
- 2) that each Ward Councillor had their own responsibilities under the Ward Action Plan, details of which are attached at the end of these minutes for information.

46. COUNCILLORS UPDATE

The Chair presented the following update on current issues in the Ward:-

- The development on the Bendbow Rise School site was moving in to Phase 2;
- Plans had been drawn up for development on Winforde Crescent;
- There was less anti-social behaviour in Braunstone than any other part of the City. This was largely due to confidence and pride in the area, generated by good policing and partnership working, which made people less tolerant of anti-social behaviour;
- Managers at the Youth House had invested in the Street Vibe youth team, which would take over the running of the Youth House. This was not a Council-funded team;
- B-Inspired had recently sponsored a meeting of all heads of primary schools to discuss attainment;
- Braunstone had one of the lowest levels of educational attainment in the City, so a Steering Group had been established through which to share experience and best practice. This included representatives of secondary schools, which was encouraging the primary and secondary sectors to work together for mutual benefit; and
- Health inequalities in the area were high. It therefore was proposed to establish a working group to consider the issues involved. Data was now available at Ward level, so the group could focus on issues of particular concern to the Ward. Key partners already were working together as a long-term project to address health issues and it was hoped that B-Inspired could sponsor a one-day event to drive this forward.

During discussion on this, some members of the community felt that anti-social behaviour was still being experienced in the Ward. Many elderly people lived in the areas where this was happening who felt they could not leave their homes. In reply, the Chair advised that the Council had funded research in to issues for the elderly and was in the process of appointing a volunteer co-ordinator. This person would encourage community organisations, such as befriending services. Details of any problems identified could be passed to the Ward Councillors for investigation.

In addition, it was noted that work was on-going on reducing the number of rogue traders in the City. It was hoped that Leicester could become the first City nationally to be a “no go” area for rogue traders.

Problems in getting appointments at the Merridale Medical Centre in Fullhurst Avenue were discussed. The meeting was reminded that similar concerns previously had been successfully discussed with doctors from the Centre at a Community Meeting and it was suggested that this approach could be tried again.

The Chair advised that Mums Supporting Mums was creating a Braunstone-based on-line community radio service. Further details of this were available from the Ward Members.

Action	Action by	Deadline
Doctors from the Merridale Medical Centre in Fullhurst Avenue to be invited to a meeting to discuss residents’ concerns about problems in getting appointments at the Centre	Palbinder Mann, Democratic Services Officer	As soon as possible

47. BUDGET

NOTED:

- 1) that the grant application from Leicester Housing Association for a remote camera would not be supported, as it was felt that this was an inappropriate type of camera, in view of problems experienced with previous ones;
- 2) that, before the grant applications for Young Stars Dodgeball (from Vicky Hudson) and a celebration of African and Caribbean roots and culture (from Ajani Women and Girls Centre) could be considered, further information was needed on how these projects would benefit the residents of the Ward; and
- 3) that, although a grant had been approved to Angels and Monsters for new play equipment, the request for a grant for repairs was still being discussed, (minute 36, 14 December 2011 referred).

48. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

a) Discussion with City Mayor

The meeting was invited to raise questions and comments about issues that were not specific to the Ward with Sir Peter Soulsby, the City Mayor. As a result, the following matters were discussed:-

- The Council had to take action over its offices at New Walk Centre, as the buildings were crumbling. Capital funding for this had been set aside for this purpose;
- Three options for new Council offices at New Walk were being considered:
 - buy somewhere else;
 - use various buildings across the City centre; or
 - rebuild the offices / redevelop the site, (probably with a partner, due to the costs involved).

The third option currently was the favoured one, as the site was a good one, but no decision on this had been taken yet;

- New Walk Centre occupied an important corner site, so the opportunity could be taken to provide something architecturally pleasing and reflective of the rest of New Walk;
- Approximately 1,600 Council staff currently were based at New Walk Centre, which was a small proportion of the total number of staff employed by the Council;
- One possibility was to relocate Council staff to various smaller buildings around the City Centre during the redevelopment of the New Walk Centre site and then possibly dispose of the other buildings as functioning offices when no longer needed for Council staff. However, as the existing offices were not used as intensively as they previously had been, the current site could be redeveloped by demolishing and rebuilding one block at a time. Full consideration had not yet been given to how this could work;
- The Council had intended to use the former Post Office building in Bishop Street as a Customer Service Centre. However, although a Customer Service Centre did not need to be in the same place as the Council's other offices, this building and location were not suitable for this use and it would be expensive to convert. It therefore would be preferable to find an alternative use for the building;
- Members of the community felt that Christmas shopping in the City Centre had not been good. They had found that some shops closed early, no-one was in the streets and it appeared that the shops in The Lanes area had not been encouraged to participate. The City Mayor recognised these problems. He noted that many people only shopped in the Highcross centre, so there was a need to encourage them to use the shops outside the centre. The City Centre Manager had established the LE1 group to find ways of encouraging improvements, (such as improving sign posting, keeping pavements clean and establishing a retail circuit);

- The Lanes would not be gated. A gateway in to the area was needed to encourage people to shop there and welcome them in, not keep them out. In this way, visitors would be welcomed and would know that they were entering a special area;
- Using accommodation over shops would be one way of encouraging people in to the City Centre. It was noted that, when the Shires shopping centre had been built it had been proposed to have flats above it, but no investors could be found for that design. However, things were changing and some flats had been provided when that shopping centre was redeveloped to become the Highcross centre. There also was a lot of potential space above other shops in the City Centre that could be considered for accommodation;
- Members of the community commented that the High Street was not an attractive route and seemed to have no life to it. Ways of improving this could be to have an open market along the route at Christmas. In response, it was noted that there were problems servicing retail premises in the City centre, as there were no back streets in that area and many shops backed on to each other. Compromises therefore had had to be made about letting lorries access the shops in the mornings, but these vehicles could cause damage to the pavements;
- Ways of bringing more life to the High Street had been considered, but it was felt that there could be greater potential for improving the area by focussing on St Nicholas Place. This area deserved to be more than a car park and could be used to draw people to that end of the High Street, (for example, by providing squares and seating that were lacking in other parts of the City);
- Consideration also was being given to how connections could be made between different parts of the City centre. Redesigning St Nicholas Square could be one way of achieving this. For example, some of the road carriageway could be used, without reducing the capacity of the road, to enable wider, more attractive pavements to be provided. This would help to make pedestrian routes more obvious and easy to use.

On behalf of all present, the Chair thanked the City Mayor for attending. In reply, the City Mayor thanked the meeting for the questions that had been raised.

b) Riverside School Site

Paul Leonard-Williams, a resident of Rowley Fields, explained that, as Rowley Fields had no open space, residents used Riverside Community College's playing fields. Unofficial access had been available to the site for this purpose for a number of years, which also provided a route through to Aylestone Meadows. Therefore, when it was proposed that the site should be used as part of the Football Foundation project and Ellesmere College decided to move to the site, it was felt that the opportunity should be taken to regularise access arrangements.

Residents had worked with the Football Foundation to maintain access and it had been agreed at a previous meeting that residents would be involved in the development of facilities for the site, (minute 14, "What Next with Riverside?", 16 August 2011 referred). This liaison had been undertaken with officers working on the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) project, as this was funding the development of the educational use of the site.

A consultation had been carried out in Autumn 2011, but the questions had not related to access, being more concerned with whether people would be interested in joining activities / clubs at the redeveloped site. The report prepared following this consultation was very dismissive of the residents' situation. (For example, a short-term proposal was to stop all access across the playing fields, on the grounds of safety, even though there already was a fence around the school buildings, and those buildings were some way from the route used by residents.) Residents had responded to the report, raising strong objections to access being stopped.

In order to maintain access to the site, residents were requesting that an area of land away from the school buildings be designated as shared fields for use by the community and the school. This would be a separate area to that identified for the Football Foundation project. It was recognised that BSF schools had to be secure, but it was hoped that a campaign could be started to gain formal access for residents to the site.

The Chair confirmed that the report produced following the consultation period had been dismissive of local residents' views and had totally dismissed the comments arising from the Community meeting held on 16 August 2011 as being outside of the time frame for the consultation. The Ward Action Plan contained a requirement to ensure that community facilities were provided for people living in Rowley Fields, but it was acknowledged that this situation would not be easy to resolve.

The following points were then made in discussion:-

- It currently was proposed that there should be no public access to the site. This could add up to approximately two miles to residents' journeys to the other side of the site. This would be particularly inconvenient for less mobile people;
- The school site currently was well used by dog walkers and cyclists, many of whom came from outside Rowley Fields;
- The scale of use of the school site meant that a lot of people would be affected if access was lost;
- It was felt that enough evidence existed to enable the route through the school grounds to be claimed as a public right of way. This would be pursued by the Ward Members; and
- Councillor Naylor suggested that he could include details of the campaign to retain access to the Riverside site on his virtual surgery.

Action	Action by	Deadline
The possibility of claiming a right of way through the Riverside site to be investigated	Ward Members	As soon as possible
Details of the campaign to retain access to the Riverside site to be included on the virtual surgery	Councillor Naylor	As soon as possible

c) Jubilee Parties

It was noted that Be Inspired hoped to host three parties in the summer to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

d) Bus Services

Councillor Naylor advised the meeting that problems with bus services were being investigated. Anyone who had experienced problems was invited to pass details to the Ward Councillors.

Action	Action by	Deadline
Details of problems experienced with bus services to be passed to the Ward Members for investigation	All	As soon as possible

e) Next Meeting

NOTED:

that the next meeting would be held on 17 April 2012 at the Oak Centre.

49. CLOSE OF MEETING

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 7.10 pm.