

Joint committee meeting of Newport Road Area Residents Association and Castlefields Residents Association

Date: 3rd July 2023
Time: 18:00 – 19:45
Attendees: Mike Court; Lorna Green; Sarah Preston; Alan Haslam; Victoria Door; Phil Kingsland; Barrie Knox; Valerie Finegan

Agenda:

1. Council developments, Station Gateway, Burleyfields, Stafford Town Centre
2. Speeding and noise
3. Tree planting
4. Litter picking
5. Golf Course development and public footpaths
6. Useful contacts
7. Funding access and uses
8. Joint meetings and potential speakers

1. Council developments, Station Gateway, Burleyfields, Stafford Town Centre

Stafford Town Centre: Sarah advised that there is some money being invested in improving the station approach: a light facelift including some paving at the front. Whilst the council would not give details on what is planned, the detail is available on the contractor's website.

There was a discussion about the lack of engagement generally from the council with regard to what it is planning for the town and whether there is a way to bring this to the attention of the borough and town councils. Lorna suggested getting in touch with a communications officer at borough council, which Mike is happy to progress. Barrie advised that the contact is Will Conaghan, Press and Communications Manager for Stafford Borough Council, and he will query the contact details for the County Council.

Other plans we need information on are those for the old M&S site and also Eastgate development, which includes the old magistrates' premises and old police station, although the local police continue to use this station. Mike advised he has a contact at the police who may do some talks in the future. Ways to get information were discussed and Mike advised that one route he was recommended by Michelle Smith, the council contact for future planning e.g. gateway, was the Economic Development and Planning Scrutiny Committee (EDPSC) meetings: the next meeting is planned for 4th July and agenda and minutes should be published on council website. Doug Rouxel attends that meeting. Victoria to ask Doug to let us know about anything that may be of interest to us. (Post meeting note (PMN) – actioned 4/7/23 and awaiting a response from Doug.)

Mike said that NRA is going to ask Doug to one of its committee meetings. Newport

used to have about three public meetings a year and would like to get them started again. There was discussion about whether it would be best to combine them given how much common ground we have, and also include Burleyfields via Tom. Lorna advised that we are stronger together and we have common aims and challenges. We could work to a joint agenda for our next public meeting on 13th September at the golf club. It was agreed that we need Doug Rouxel as a speaker, and invite a planning officer from the borough council or someone from the EDPSC to talk about the town centre plans.

Mike advised that previously NRA had applied for and been awarded two lots of £500 from the council. CRA previously had £500 from the community fund for a bench. Barrie to speak to Mark about accessing community funds generally and Victoria to query Doug on same matter.

Station Gateway – Victoria has a petition signed by 40 people and has passed a plan for the green corridor plus the addition of swales and islands coming down Martin Drive (as a traffic calming measure) to Tara Hollingsworth at the council. Tara has confirmed receipt but not yet provided any feedback. A Castlefields resident has offered to draw up the plans to make them more official. Mike advised that it is likely the council will ask for needs to be demonstrated. Alan noted there are regular crashes at the roundabout. Sarah said our priority should be to protect and plan our green spaces and that NRA is keen to support our ideas. Mike advised re FOI – if there are problems Mike knows the manager who deals with FOI so may be able to move things forward. Victoria advised that the next stage is submitting ideas for reshaping the gateway – for example have the rugby pitch as a green space, have mid-rise housing (2-3 stories) on the car park near Kingsway and more housing behind Roots, having housing on the Hollies area. Keep the central green space for regenerative projects e.g. there are two people who work in gerontology interesting in designing a garden for the elderly; a childrens garden/play space and a community permaculture garden. Housing could be housing association, using zero-carbon-concrete building methods.

Mike advised that NRA tried to get in touch with GEN shoes (owners of the site Roots is on). GEN shoes still own the land as the government funding that was hoped for never came through. The site is flagged as commercial use only. The Hollies owners' interest is in getting the rent from the commercial properties, however if they sought a change of use they would get a fortune from putting 90 houses on the site. Victoria queried if SBC has given permission to having it developed why cannot they change the use – i.e. if SBC can make a decision one way they can make it the other. Mike – Stafford Local Plan covers next 20 years – the gateway is included in this and it has been agreed. Victoria is challenging this with the council as public did not get enough consultation opportunity. Council said it was a vision so we are asking why cannot they amend their vision. Mike has met the leader of the Labour group at the council (Aidan Godfrey). Jeremy Pert is the leader of the conservatives. It would be good to get Aidan and Jeremy involved.

It was agreed that Doug would be our best contact for any strategic planning. Mike thinks that the council will start development where they own the land which is Doxey. Need Doug to keep us informed re Palmbourne and Stoneacre sites and what the plans are. There is some indication that Stoneacre is going to be used by the college, Victoria to ask Doug about this.

Reshaping the Gateway Part 2 will include one/two islands in the 'lake' and measures to improve the water quality. Victoria suggested asking residents to send their photos to a particular website because we want to create an album of local flora and fauna. Victoria to find address and Valerie to issue email to residents. Phil advised that water quality got a lot worse when the Deans Court development was done – a lot of rubbish went down a culvert into the pond. The grid under the roundabout is not being properly cleared. Mike queried if it is worth getting a 'Friends of the Balancing Pond' group set up to champion the pond. Efforts have been made to get Staffordshire Wildlife Trust involved, and Victoria advised that Nextdoor Nature has been contacted. Mike queried if the pond be designated as a particular type of area that would enable us to get more control over its future.

2. Speeding and Noise

Phil advised that the community speedwatch initiative is up and running and that two speedwatch events had taken place so far on Martin Drive. 938 vehicles between 5pm and 6pm last Thursday – 37 speeders one of which was doing 52 mph. If a vehicle is detected on three speedwatch events the driver gets a warning letter from the police. Once we are up and running we could ask for some sites to be identified on Newport road to do the speedwatch. Barrie chasing Mark Winnington for the funds to pay for the speedgun.

3. Tree planting

Sarah wanted to say well done on the recent tree planting on Redgrave Drive as NRA had tried a similar approach on Kingsway and did not succeed.

Phil showed examples of the signs he has made for the trees. Could be used for people to adopt a tree and could help raise funds.

4. Litter picking – NRA has a pick every other Wednesday. Would be good to advertise each other's dates. It was agreed that a lot of people do their own picking which may explain the reasonably low turnouts for these events.

Sarah has queried the council re the bins that have gone missing on Newport Road. Council said it was doing an assessment. Sarah has chased for the outcome, will chase again.

5. Golf Course development and public path

Sarah advised that Carlyne Trowbridge had previously mentioned that it was likely

that the land would be sold off for housing and that the golf course would be moved to the other side of the castle. There is outline planning permission for 12 houses where the golf clubhouse is currently sited.

One of the public footpaths at the golf course had been blocked and Doug Rouxel went to the golf club and got it to remove the blockage. Thanks to Doug for his prompt action.

6. Useful contacts

It was acknowledged that we had been doing that during the meeting – sharing contact details of those we need to communicate with to support our aims.

7. Funding – Lorna advised that the balancing pond is important to all of us and that it is worth focusing on funding for that. Phil thinks that the walk from Rose Hill to the Burleyfields play area would benefit from a couple of benches.

8. Joint meetings and potential speakers

As discussed under earlier agenda items.

9. Any Other Business

Potholes - Mike advised that one of the residents on Brunswick Terrace expressed concern to the council about the number of potholes on Newport road. There are a few bad potholes near the railway bridge. Doug sent a supporting note and Mike also wrote asking for a site visit from Highways to discuss what to do. The council's view is that the holes are a bridge fault and therefore need to be fixed by Network Rail.

Next Meeting – Lorna and Sarah to discuss having another joint meeting before the public meeting in September to agree a joint agenda.