

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BETTER JOBS AND SKILLS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY 8 DECEMBER, 2016, AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT:

Councillors

Martin, Mrs. C.E. (Chairman)
Sutherland, M. (Vice-Chairman)

Cooper, Miss J.	Hardman, W.T.A.
Freeman, Miss M.A.	Johnson, T.B.
Grice, Mrs. D.	Molineux, G.N.
Hoare, M.W.A. (substituting for G. Burnett)	

Also in attendance as an observer:

- Councillor G. Alcott (Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader);

(The Chairman advised that she had agreed to amend the order of the agenda to accommodate one of the speakers).

16. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted for Councillors G. Burnett, M.S. Buttery and P.A. Snape.

Notification had been received that Councillor Hoare would be in attendance as substitute for Councillor Burnett.

17. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members and Party Whip Declarations

No declarations of interests or party whip declarations were received.

18. Update on the Relocation of Gestamp UKs Cannock Facility

Ian Middleton from Gestamp provided Members with an update on the relocation of Gestamp to the site at Four Ashes.

He explained that Gestamp had outgrown their existing site and it was not conducive to modern day production. The Management Team and parent group in

Spain were keen to continue to operate in the area and had explored various relocation options to keep jobs in the Midlands. The only option available in the area was the site at Four Ashes as it was large enough for their needs. This would enable the vast majority of the workforce to be retained.

Work had commenced on the relocation to Four Ashes but there would be very little impact in 2017 at the site in Cannock as the move would be done progressively. There would be no complete exit from the Cannock site until 2020. The Management Team was working with the District Council and the Local MP to keep a presence in Cannock and it was proposed to create a high tech training centre on the existing site which would create new jobs. He confirmed that he would be willing to return to update the Committee with more detail as necessary.

In terms of the plans for the existing site he advised that part of the site was leased and the remainder was owned by the company. The appointment of planning consultants was currently taking place. They would advise on the best options for the part owned by the company. Consultations with a group of local residents would be commencing soon as they were keen to know what was being proposed for the site.

He further advised that the company were in the early stages of assessing the transport needs of existing employees to ensure those that couldn't drive could get to the new site. An employee survey had been undertaken in October and discussions were now underway.

Following the update Members were offered the opportunity to ask questions. A Member expressed her concern regarding the transport issues of the existing employees and was encouraged to hear that the company was in the process of addressing this. She also highlighted the concerns of local residents in respect of the future plans for the existing site. She was pleased to note that a presence would be retained at the existing site by the opening of a training centre.

Ian Middleton shared the Councillors concern and confirmed that the company had worked hard to keep the facility in Cannock open and to retain the majority of jobs. The Four Ashes site was more suitable for the company's needs as the current site had parking and traffic issues.

A Member asked whether relocation to Kingswood Lakeside had been considered. Ian Middleton confirmed that Kingswood Lakeside had been considered but the site did not offer the appropriate shape, scale or size. The site at Four Ashes was the best option available.

With regard to the future plans for the Cannock site Ian Middleton confirmed that 15 acres of the site were owned by the company and 5 acres was leased. It was anticipated that outline planning permission would be sought on the 15 acres for a mixture of housing and commercial use.

The Chairman thanked Ian Middleton for attending the Committee and providing the update and for offering to return and provide Members with a further update as and when necessary.

19. Update on the Chase Line Electrification

Richard Dugdale, Network Rail was in attendance to provide an update on the Chase Line Electrification. The Committee were provided with a presentation which outlined the following:-

- Reasons for the project
- Features of the electrification
- Progress update on Route Clearance
- Progress update on electrification
- Affordability
- Interfacing projects:-
 - Journey Time Reduction
 - Bloxwich Crossing

He confirmed that £100million was being spent on this route. It was on the same transport axis as the M6 and the trains themselves were very busy. It would provide an opportunity to reduce journey times, increase the frequency of the service and provide a means to introduce more trains into the West Midlands with a “cascade” of rolling stock to other routes. It would better utilise the already electrified infrastructure between Birmingham and Walsall.

He then showed the Committee photographs which outlined the track lowering and bridge reconstruction at Wyrley and Essington Canal aqueduct and Walkers Rise, Hednesford, the track lowering at Walsall tunnel and the Park Street soffit demolition.

He confirmed that the key milestones included the reopening of the final road to traffic (Central Drive) and the piling and parapet works that had been completed. The Department for Transport had visited the line and remained supportive and public information events had been held in Walsall and Bloxwich.

He commented on the road closure over the crossing in Bloxwich and on the proposed closure of the two footpath crossings. Reference was also made to the fencing and vegetation management.

Finally he outlined the challenges being worked on, as follows:-

- Historic mine working
- Overhead electrification equipment interface at Walsall/Pleck
- Planning issues
- Ensuring value for money
- Overhead line configuration
- Speed profile

The next steps were:

- to close the Bloxwich level crossing and construct the footbridge
- footpath crossings (Landywood and Stoneyfields)
- Line speed improvements

- Complete parapet works including agreeing a way forward with three local authority footbridges
- Construct electrification equipment
- Fencing and vegetation management
- “Entry into Service” works
- Infrastructure ready for use – December 2017

Following the presentation the Chairman commented that the works completed so far had made a great improvement to the line. She had concern that trains to Birmingham were often cancelled and welcomed a more frequent service. She considered four carriage trains should be used as a minimum as trains were often full especially since Amazon had opened in Rugeley.

Richard Dugdale confirmed that trains would be at least three carriages and would run more frequently (every half hour as standard). However, it would be difficult to operate four carriage trains due to the length of the platforms along the route.

A Member asked whether there were plans to improve the platforms and stations especially now that the Mill Green Designer Village (MGDV) had been granted planning permission. Richard Dugdale advised that he was not aware of any active project as yet but there were discussions on going which would see some station improvements as a result of the MGDV.

A Member considered that consultation with residents regarding the level crossing and footpath closures was important. Richard Dugdale confirmed that there would be drop in sessions held at libraries and schools to advise of these plans and there would be liaison with all relevant bodies.

A Member commented on the condition of the rolling stock. He also made reference to the lack of fare collection and considered this needed to be addressed. He then referred to the bigger demand that would be placed on Cannock Station in the future as a result of the MGDV.

Richard Dugdale responded and advised that there was to be a new operator next October who would address fare collection as part of their plans. The frustration with the rolling stock was noted and the trains would be refreshed with the new franchise and there may be plans for new rolling stock.

The Economic Development and Planning Portfolio Leader thanked Richard Dugdale for attending the Committee and providing Members with an update on the Chase Line Electrification. He expressed his disappointment that Staffordshire County Council (who was the transport authority) had declined the offer for a representative to attend the meeting. He was also disappointed that Arriva had also declined the offer to attend the meeting. He considered that letters should be forwarded to Staffordshire County Council and Arriva to express the Committee’s concern regarding their none attendance.

He then made reference to a Working Group between representatives from the District Council, Network Rail and London Midland that had been set up to

discuss the station issues and the need for improvements. West Midlands Combined Authority and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP had been approached to see if any funding was available to improve the stations.

20. Minutes

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager confirmed that with regard to page 12 the bid for “Celebrate” lottery funding for a carnival event in Hednesford in August 2017 had been successful and £10,000 had been received.

He further commented that with regard to Minute 10 (page 8) there had been no challenge to the Mill Green Designer Outlet Village and the planning permission was effectively ‘live’.

He also made reference to the discussion at the previous meeting regarding the concern about the relocation of Gestamp’s facility in Cannock. He advised that Ian Middleton had attended the meeting today and provided the Committee with an update and had given a commitment to keep Members informed of any developments.

He commented that the update in respect of the West Midlands Combined Authority had been deferred at this meeting and the previous one due to the Head of Economic Development not being available. The Managing Director was leading on this and he was available to attend the next meeting on 12 April, 2017 to provide Members with an update.

He clarified that it had been intended that today’s meeting was to be mainly focussed on transport matters. Jeff Tucker from Staffordshire County Council had initially said he could attend but had then confirmed he was unavailable for the meeting. Additionally Arriva had been approached but were unable to attend.

The Chairman asked that letters be sent to Staffordshire County Council and Arriva to express the Committee’s concern regarding their respective none attendance and inviting them to attend another meeting on a date that was convenient for them.

RESOLVED:

- (A) That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September, 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed.
- (B) That the Managing Director be invited to attend the meeting on 12 April, 2017 to provide an update on the West Midlands Combined Authority.
- (C) That letters be sent to Staffordshire County Council and Arriva to express the Committee’s concern regarding their none attendance and inviting them to attend a meeting on a date that was convenient for them and a further meeting be arranged accordingly.

21. Quarter 2 Performance Report – Better Jobs and Skills Priority Delivery Plan

Members noted the latest performance information (Item 5.1 to 6.9 of the Official Minutes of the Council) and the Planning and Economic Development Services Manager outlined the highlights in relation to the performance indicators.

22. Work Programme Update

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager referred Members to the updated Work Programme (Item 7.1 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

He confirmed that in order to continue the discussions on transport issues a further meeting would be arranged on a date that was convenient for Staffordshire County Council and Arriva to attend.

He outlined the issues due to be discussed at the meeting on 12 April, 2017 which would have an education theme.

As advised earlier in the meeting he confirmed that the Managing Director would be invited to attend the meeting on 12 April, 2017 to provide an update on the WMCA.

RESOLVED:

That a further meeting of the Committee be arranged on a date that was convenient for Staffordshire County Council and Arriva to attend in order to continue the discussions on transport issues.

The meeting closed at 5.15pm.

CHAIRMAN