

St Helens Resident's Association

Minutes of Open Meeting

Date: 30th April 2009

Venue: St Helens Church Hall

Attendance:

Chair: Clare Singleton

Minutes: Henry Peterson

Members of the public (90), and SHRA management committee members.

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed members of the Silchester Tenants and Residents Association, Cllr Judith Blakeman, and Martyn Freeman (chief executive of Westway Development Trust).

2. Treasurer's report

Ruth Hillary advised the meeting that the Association's funds stood at £169, with no creditors. A collection would be made at the end of the meeting to help fund the cost of circulars and leaflets.

3. Westway Development Trust – advertising towers

The chair introduced this as the main item for discussion, and identified the Association's main concerns:

How did WDT's decision to lease of land for advertising towers fit with the objects of the Trust, as a charitable amenity body?

How many local residents were consulted?

How is the Trust balancing the revenue gained with the social costs involved?

Martyn Freeman responded on behalf of the Trust, explaining:

The Trust (WDT) is a legal body established and run by 16 trustees, with the role of achieving benefit for the area (Borough of RBK&C and adjacent boroughs).

The objects of WDT are set out on the Trust's website at <http://www.westway.org> and were read out to the meeting.

At the start of its existence in the 1970's WDT was 'handed a liability and overdraft' in terms of the disused land under Westway. Achieving the Trust's objects cost money. Income derived from commercial properties provided a £1.4m subsidy to the Sports Centre and other facilities provided by WDT.

The advertising towers had been the subject of normal planning processes, with the planning application submitted by J C Decaux who had leased the land under the towers from WDT. Public consultation had been carried out by the council as planning authority. WDT had organised a supplementary 2 day consultation in the foyer of the sports centre.

The Chair then opened up the meeting to questions from the floor. The following questions were raised, and responses given (shown in italics).

Why did WDT appeal to the Planning Inspectorate, against the council's decision to refuse planning permission on 3 proposed towers? *The Trust has found it necessary to appeal on most of its developments, following initial refusal of planning permission*

Did trustees make the decision to go to appeal? *This formed part of the initial decision process to lease land for advertising towers.*

Were trustees aware of what the towers would look like, at the beginning of the process? *The Trust works through a series of sub-committees including one on Property and Planning. This handled the process of tendering the sites for towers, with the tender won by J C Decaux. Presentations were made by J C Decaux to the sub-committee, including drawings and images of what the towers would look like.*

Did any of these images show the view from the St Quintin conservation area? *No, they were from the A40 axis, i.e. east/west.*

Cllr Blakeman advised that she had written to ward councillors at the time of the original application, and was told the council consistently opposed advertising along Westway. The council's refusal to this application was taken by officers under delegated powers, and did not come before elected councillors.

Did trustees realise that the towers would be very controversial? *There is reference to this likelihood in the WDT 2007 Annual Report.*

How does the Trust balance revenue gain against social costs, in the context of its objects as a charity? *WDT is a body regulated by the Charity Commission, with duties to make use of its property and assets. It operates in a commercial manner in respect of its property portfolio.*

But given that it is charitable trust, and not a commercial company, surely there has to be a proper and considered balance when commercial and social/environmental aims conflict, including risks to the Trust's reputation and of potential loss of donations? *Yes, the trustees are regularly balancing such issues.*

How long is the lease to J C Decaux? *Fifteen years.*

Cllr Blakeman raised the possibility of a review of planning permission after 5 years, built into the statutory framework for planning control of advertising.

Who is taking the risk, if advertising revenue falls? *The lease between WDT and J C Decaux guarantees a level of income to the Trust.*

What is the revenue income gained by WDT from these leases? *Not prepared to say, as the terms of all the Trust's leases are commercially confidential.*

Why were so few local residents consulted or notified over the plans for the towers (a handful of the audience indicated that they had received consultation letters from the council)? *This is a matter for the council which conducted the consultation process on the planning applications.*

Could any assurance be given that Silchester Estate residents had received letters? These were habitually left in bundles in the entrance foyer to each block, and not properly distributed? *This would be a matter for the council.*

Why did WDT not consult local people more widely, given its role as an amenity trust? *There had been the consultation in the Sports Centre foyer.*

Were any public notices put up, either by the council or by WDT? *Could not say from personal knowledge, as this would have been prior to my appointment).*

Were any notices placed in the local press? *Probably not.*

Given the position reached, were there any controls over the advertising to be placed on the hoardings? *Advertising would need to meet statutory and national requirements (e.g. Advertising Standards Authority. Also any requirements imposed by Transport for London, on highways advertising. WDT do not impose other conditions on their tenants.*

What about light pollution from illuminated adverts? *J C Decaux has been asked to provide more detailed information on this issue.*

Do WDT understand the implications of siting illuminated advertising hoardings of this scale so close to the windows of peoples homes, where these was the first thing that e.g. young children will see on waking? *Not prepared to give a personal view. Am here to represent the position of the Trust.*

How to local people complain about the Trust's actions? What procedures are in place for this? *The Trust has a complaints procedure, which will be sent to the Association. 23 letters of complaint have been received. Complaints can be made to the chair or chief executive of WDT.*

How are trustees appointed or elected to WDT. *Half are nominated by the council, the other half are elected from local community organisations. St Helens Residents Association can apply to be one of these.*

How will the views of this public meeting be communicated back to WDT? *I will be making a report and conveying issues and concerns raised at the meeting.*

The Chair thanked Martyn Freeman for coming to the meeting and answering questions. The Association hoped that the strength of feeling of local people, as reflected in the numbers attending and the questions raised, would be fed back to trustees. The Association would also be following up a number of these points.

4. Other business

Given the range of concerns and questions raised on the WDT advertising towers, it was **agreed** to set up an action committee to pursue these further. Those interested were asked to leave names and email addresses.

On planning issues generally:

The Association's management committee now routinely monitor all planning applications in the area, and have registered objections to a further application for an advertising tower in St Marks Road.

The outcome of a planning appeal on the Latimer Road development was still awaited. The Association has made representations at the appeal hearing.

The St Helens Food Store had asked for a view from the Association on its proposal to extend its opening hours by one hour. *(One member of the public at the meeting indicated an objection, on grounds of extra traffic generation).*

The meeting closed at 21.10. **Date for next public meeting Thursday 25th June. Main item will be policing and community safety.**