**MINUTES OF THE TETTENHALL COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Parish Rooms, Tettenhall**

**27th March 2025**

**at 6.30 pm**

**APOLOGIES**

Nicola and Malcolm Rudge, Sally Hathaway.

There were 15 residents in attendance.

**SMESTOW VALLEY NATURE RESERVE UPDATE**

Catherine Perry (CP) thanked the Forum for the opportunity to update them on the imporvements to the Smestow Valley Nature Reserve. She explained that they were nearing the end of the capital project and a number of separate activities are now being completed or largely completed. This included the canal towpath improvement project and because there had been some underspend it has been possible to look at some additional activities such as graffiti removal from the bridges. There had also been the installation of some low level floor lighting between Tettenhall Old Bridge and Hordern Road. There had also been some meadow enhancement where seeds had been scattered from adjacent meadows to encourage growth and a small hedged enclosure designed to be relatively people free to encourage and support birds and animals. An ancient farm pond had also been identified and some improvements undertaken. This pond had been in existance since 1908 in Aldersley fields and had been cleaned up in the hope that it would retain water for longer into the season and enhance the local habitat. There is a planting volunteer day on Thursday 3rd April. Residents are encouraged to go along and join in. Friends of the Valley Reserve have also planted an orchard. Access can be gained from the middle path from Cupcake Lane access point. Varieties include Tettenhall Dick, an ancient and locally sourced variety of pear. There had also been some work to cut down invasive species to let in daylight and bluebells and wild garlic will be planted. This represents the end of the capital fund and future expenses will now come from the revenue fund which involves various activities with many local organisations being involved, for example a communications newsletter is now being published – the first edition was available from 26th March on the Smestow Valley Facebook page. Residents are encouraged to complete the online survey.

Also last week there was a student filming activity and a media and digital skills bootcamp. Short taster videos were being created to be available for wider communication.

There is a plan to supply drone footage via the National Ground Field Institute.

There has been some water testing of the brook and it was noted that there is a lot of plastic waste in the brook and fallen trees which is impacting flow. Whereas there is a desire to clear this there are technical reservations regarding concern for pollutants being carried downstream and specialist advice is probably needed on this. The water quality is generally good from the two other brooks which enter the main stream but there is some pollution which is difficult to source since these brooks are culverted in places and it would be very costly to unculvert them. There is some suspicion that the pollution may be historic and longstanding and held in the bed of the brook, possibly originating from the old Courtaulds factory in Whitmore Reans. It appears that the water quality improves downstream and regarding possible discharges from the sewage works at the bottom of Jenny Walker’s Lane Severn Trent can be accessed for records of discharges from this plant.

The Wildlife Trust is organising a bio blitz which encourages people to engage in looking carefully and in detail at plants and animals under the guidance from people who will help them to appreciate and understand the local fauna and flora.

There is a heritage school event planned for teachers with 8 schools already signed up.

A Summer festival is organised for 21st June where there will be music, bio blitz activities and the opportunity to investigate the geology in the area. CP pointed out that this will be an ideal opportunity for the Forum to have a stall and engage with other local organisations and residents.

There are heritage open days planned, including one at Wightwick Manor. The 910 AD Battles activity is already engaged and involved with this open day. There is also a discussion about arranging boat trips.

After CP’s informative talk a discussion took place. A question was asked about safety and CP pointed out that based on the automatic counting system the number of users was increasing and had increased significantly following the recent activities. Lots of walkers, families and photographers are accessing the Reserve. From feedback it appears that most concerns are caused by motorcycle riders but the Reserve is generally very safe, particularly during daylight hours.

There was a question about whether signage was adequate and CP pointed out that notwhithstanding that many local people did not know about the facilities there were lots of brown signs indicating the access points.

A question was asked as to whether car parking was adequate. Notwithstanding the fact that there is plenty of parking at Cupcake Lane there was minimal parking at the other site entrances.

CP pointed out that there had been significant consideration to whether the facility would be promoted for mainly local use or to encourage people coming in from some distance. She said that the current strategy was based on providing access to the 200,000 people who lived within easy access of the Nature Reserve rather than concentrating on external visitors.

**MATTERS ARISING**

 **ROCK JUNCTION**

Robin Hacking (RH) and Neal Kelshaw (NK) updated the Forum on their recent correspondence from John Charles who is the Highways Engineer. The Council are still resisting any communication with local residents and meetings with residents and their representative bodies. Their firm position is that they will do nothing until their consultants report. This is of continuing concern to residents since this includes continual failure to respond to the residents’ 6 point proposal for alternative improvements to the junction as expressed in the 1,000+ signature petition delivered to the Council in April 2024. The residents continue to be concerned at the lack of response to formal complaints raised through the Council’s complaints system and refusal to acknowledge that the residents’ petition should be considered separately to the Council’s TTRO proposals dating from December 2023. Residents feel that the Council are not properly following their own procedures and the process for responding to petitions by acting in this way.

One of the Forum attendees had conducted a straw poll among residents in the Lothians Road area. He found one resident who felt the proposals would reduce congestion in Lothians Road, however his wife strongly disagreed with him! However the overwhelming feedback was that those residents contacted assumed that the Council had now abandoned their TTRO proposals.

 **910 AD BATTLES**

Following the meetings with Severn Trent and Tettenhall College the Steering Group had concluded that the financial commitments associated with any current sharing of the facilities on the Regis Road site would be too onerous for local residents to be involved in but it is important that contact is maintained with severn Trent to see how things develop in the future.

The contact with Tettenhall College was more promising. There is an opportunity to engage with them for developing educational material based on the 910 AD Battles. The school’s history department already teaches the history of these battles as part of their curriculum and the school badge includes an icon relating to the battles. The history teacher is already in contact with Becky Cresswell and the 910 AD Battles program. The school is anxious to make their relationship with the community more open and, within their constraints regarding safeguarding, would be happy to see their facilities having more use in the local community. The swimming pool is already used by external organisations and there are events in the theatre area which has received some interest from the Theatre Trust because of this unique private theatre. The current layout of the building around the old entrance is restricted by a large number of small rooms and there is a desire to open up this area to provide a more engaging and useful concourse.

**PLANNING**

Lower Green Health Centre

The Council’s refusal of the appeal for the restriction of the unsightly scaffolding arrangement on the roof has been justified by a different interpretation of the Planning Policy relating to this community asset than is understood to be the case by the Forum. The Forum’s understanding is that this planning request should have been subject to a public consultation whereas the Council has taken the view that this is only the case if the planning request includes a proposal for a change of use. Planning regulations do not allow an appeal against an appeal but we can raise our concerns by way of a complaint that the Council is not interpreting planning guidelines correctly. NK has taken an action to discuss this with the Planning Department.

Lower Green Terrace

This terrace of properties opposite the Health centre in Lower Green is also a matter for concern. RH has been helping a resident who is concerned about substantial modifications to their neighbouring property which has been undertaken without Planning Consent or Listed Building Consent. The Council originally declined to get involved but after persistent requests “advised” the neighbour, unsuccessfully, to stop work. Following further approaches to the Council by another neighbour who wishes to undertake similar work but IS being required to seek Planning Consent and Listed Building Consent the Council have now issued an instruction for the original work to cease and have indicated that they will conduct an inspection.

Lower Green Conservation Area – UPVC Windows

The property immediately below the property previously known as The Mitre had begun installing UPVC windows without Planning Consent. Since this is contrary to the guidelines outlined for the Lower Green Conservation Area the local Residents Association sought to require hardwood windows to be used in the repair as had been required in other properties in this Conservation Area. The Council required the installation of hardwood windows and the resident appealed this on the grounds that if they had they submitted an original Planning Consent for UPVC windows it would have been approved. The Council upheld his appeal. Again, based on our inability to appeal an appeal residents and the Forum who will support this activity will need to raise a complaint regarding the Council’s interpretation of the planning regulations associated with the Conservation Area. The Forum believes there is a trend apparent regarding these planning applications and NK will seek a dialogue with the Planning Department to understand how Listed Building Regulations and regulations associated with Conservation areas can be applied to better represent the wishes of local residents and the contents of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Works on Avenue House

Neighbours adjacent to this house are closely monitoring current activities on this Listed building which has been empty and deteriorating since it ceased to operate as a nursing home many years ago. The Forum received a presentation from one of these neighbours regarding their concerns and in doing so sought the support of the Forum in ensuring that any developments are appropriate. Recently a previous developer proposed a construction of a 3 storey block of apartments with underground parking and the restoration of the Listed building via conversion to a number of high status apartments. This developer consulted with the local community who are keen for the site to be developed before further deterioration but are anxious that any development that takes place is appropriate and achieved with as little disruption to neighbouring properties as possible. However what is believed to be a new developer is now working on the site undertaking groundwork. On the positive side a number of unsightly skips and detritus have been removed but on the negative side the ground is being significantly disturbed now with lorries dumping old tarmac waste and there appears to be an attempt to fill in the ravine which leads down to The Lodge at the bottom of the cutting on Tettenhall Road. Apparently some of these lorries have already damaged a resident’s lawn while gaining access and there is concern for children playing in that area. The Lodge was originally the lodge for the property but is now used as secure accommodation and access through and round this lodge would need to be managed in a most careful way. The residents have already approached the Planning Department but in line with procedures the department are unable to discuss any pre-planning discussions taking place between the developer and the Planning Department since they are considered to be private. The developer has already acknowledged that this is part of the Tettenhall Conservation Area and the site, which is a large wild and uncultivated area of the escarpment, is inhabited by badgers and foxes. A bat survey has been conducted. CP was able to inform us that this site is part of what is known as the Wightwick Wedge and is being considered for SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation) status. The Forum is happy to support the local residents in this situation to ensure the site gets developed from its deteriorating status but in a way which is acceptable to local residents and the characteristics of the Conservation area, much as was achieved during the redevelopment of Stockwell House where, after heavy involvement from local residents, public meetings with the developer and enforcement action by the Council requiring attention to the deterorating buildings has now culminated in a successful development which is currently progressing well.

**STEERING GROUP UPDATE**

There has been further correspondence from Ian Culley relating to the approval of our registration. Apparently in the early days of the Forum and the formation of the Tettenhall District Community Trust our ward councillors submitted a list of people who would potentially be interested in constructing the new Neighbourhood Plan for Tettenhall when the current one reaches its renewal date in 2026. This has created the mistaken impression in the Council that there are 2 applications for a Forum. During the meeting NK received information from one of the ward councillors that they would be happy to correct this misunderstanding and the Steering Group will discuss how to bring these 2 lists together and resolve the final issue delaying our registration. It also remains important to gain the approval, if not support, of all the local ward councillors and the Steering Group continue to work on finalising this issue.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Forum was made aware of the next Love Your Community meeting which will be held on 10th April at Wolverhampton Cricket Club between 6.00pm and 8.00pm. This announcement created an animated discussion regarding the effectiveness of this meeting. It was widely felt that in its previous configuration as a PACT meeting (Police and Community Trust meeting) it was effective and useful but the changed format where in addition to hearing from the local Police presentations are delivered from various Council departments and individuals raise one to one issues with the Council representatives present. During this initial phase of the meeting attendees are left waiting with nothing to do and as a result of this attendance has become very sparse. At the last meeting there were only a handful of residents in attendance, most of which were TCF members. A suggestion was made that it should return to be closer to the original PACT meeting and given that current serious lack of traffic enforcement is an increasingly major concern to residents, viz speeding on Henwood Road and Stockwell End, traffic light violations at the Rock, what the residents would really prefer is a PACT meeting with Police and Council on traffic regulation reinforcement. These recommendations will be made to Chris Jellyman at the next LYC meeting. Residents are encouraged to attend. Bearing in mind previous offers from Police representatives to attend meetings if it proves impossible to encourage the LYC meeting to cover the issue of traffic enforcement thoroughly as a major topic at the meeting the Forum will request a specific attendance at one of our regular meetings dedicated entirely to this important topic which is of widespread concern in the community.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 20.45

The next Forum meeting will take place on Thursday 17th April 2025 at the Parish Rooms starting at 6.30pm.

Outline agenda for next meeting:

* APOLOGIES
* MATTERS ARISING
* STEERING GROUP UPDATE
* ANY OTHER BUSINESS