

Red House Park Friends Group

19th February 2007

Meeting Notes

Sarah Carter, Chair, opened the meeting at 6.45p.m..

1. Present

Bob Badham – Cabinet Member	Jean Jones
Peter Manley – Corporate Property Sandwell	Josh Bannister
Martin Hall – BCTV	Guy Hale
Anthea Rawlence – BCTV	Cllr Mary Wilson
Des Murphy - BCTV	Stephanie Page
Hugh Edwards – Property Hammer	Glen and Dawn Williams
Jason Cross	PCSO Siverns
Steve West SMBC	PCSO Scott
Ray Wheatley	Sadie Smith
Sonia Vaughan	(List available of additional members
Bill Gunn	Of the community that attended)
Christine Horton	

2. Apologies

Jenny Hale
Cllr Tony Ward

The Meeting was opened by Martin Hall – Head of Property at BCTV Enterprises who gave a brief history of BCTV's involvement in the Red House. They acquired it mid 1980's and it was used for environmental conferences and training programmes. In 1996 BCTV obtained a grant of £90,000.00 for the Red House and matched this figure, using these funds of £180,000.00 to improve the external appearance of the Red House. Then BCTV lost a lot of work through changing circumstances and the building became too big for their needs and was costing forty to fifty thousand per year to maintain and insure. In May 2003 they gave six months notice to move out on the understanding that the lease would be reassigned. After they moved out Sandwell Council reversed their decision and actually put a lot of difficulties in their way. BCTV hold the lease until 2023.

Martin Hall said they felt the best use for the House would be either to be sold for apartments which would maintain the look of the House and keep it in good order or to be used for commercial purposes.

He introduced Hugh Edwards to the meeting. Mr Edwards is from a company called Property Hammer in Birmingham. He explained to the meeting that his business which would commence trading in April 07 as a Property Sales Company would be very interested in using the Red House as a Corporate Headquarters and a Training Centre. They would maintain the Red House and invest in the Park also.

Bob Badham - Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Transport addressed the meeting explaining that he had come along with Peter Manley head of Corporate Property in Sandwell to answer questions and discuss the Red House. He explained that the Red House has not been sold and there is currently no decision to sell the House. He pointed out that BCTV were tenants in the building

but he was aware they wanted to reassign their lease. He said that tonight was the first time he had heard of Hugh Edwards' Proposal but he said the council would certainly be interested in discussing it further. Bob Badham said that there were really only three viable options for the House.

1. The House to be sold to Developers as BCTV said and apartments built. This would mean that the exterior of the house would be renovated and retain its appearance. Bob Badham told the meeting that the Council would not expect to make a profit from the sale, the money would be reinvested back into the Park.
2. The House would be used for commercial use as per the proposal made by Hugh Edwards .
3. The Community to put forward a business plan to use the House and generate enough income to pay for the upkeep and ongoing maintenance costs of the House. He did add that this would be a daunting task but added that there were grants available that community groups could access but were not available for the Council. The Council would only charge a peppercorn rent . Sarah Carter asked about Haden Hill Park and Bob Badham confirmed that The Friends Group at this Park have no financial responsibility for the property which is used by the Community.

Sarah Carter asked Bob Badham why when Sandwell Council paid considerable sums of money hiring conference venues (£375,000 had been quoted) they could not use the Red House which they actually owned . Bob Badham said that a feasibility study had been done but it was considered not viable because the staffing costs would be £100,000, refurbishment nearly a million and the running costs would be £235,000. It was considered that the cost of the roof, heating and plumbing would amount to half a million pounds. The Meeting did question these costs especially as Des Murphy (keyholder of the Red House for BCTV) confirmed that no one had been in the Red House to do the surveys. Bob Badham said that the 'Friends ' are free to get their own quotes.

There was a lot of discussion about the ideas and proposals that had been put to Sandwell Council for uses of the Red House. Sarah Carter asked particularly why Barclays Sports Academy had not been considered as a viable option. Both Bob Badham and Peter Manley said that it wasn't a proper application. Bob Badham confirmed that he will look at the Barclays Sports Academy paperwork. Other options have also been put forward but seem to have been turned down by the Council without proper consideration. Bob Badham said that whoever takes over the lease has to prove they have the resources to maintain and improve the Red House and they would not reassign the lease unless the Council were sure they had this capability.

Sadie Smith asked why the Red House was so low down the priority list of old buildings in Sandwell. Peter Manley explained that it was because it was in a lease. The Red House is a Grade 2 listed building but it is a grey area as to what the listing includes. Bob Badham told the meeting that the listing of the Park can be looked at and again stressed that no decision on the House has been made and that the Park will be protected. Bob Badham confirmed that there were no plans to sell the land presently used by the Horticultural Centre opposite the Red House.

It was stated by both Peter Manley and Bob Badham that the Council would not be using the Red House for their own use but they confirmed that the Officers of the Council will meet with BCTV and 'Friends of the Red House' to discuss all possibilities relating to the future of the Red House. Bob Badham gave assurances that all proposals put forward will be seriously considered. Sadie Smith asked Bob Badham not to commit any Department to lease or buy elsewhere when the Red House is there.

Any Other Business

Rangers and Wardens – during the discussion on the Red House Bob Badham said there were no plans to take away the Rangers, the plan was actually to expand the service and give them more enforcement powers so they became more effective.

Bins - Seventeen new bins are being installed now

Roses – Quotes were coming in for the roses to go in the bed outside the House

Monument – The man responsible for the rendering on the monument is on long term sick

Notice Board – We will have three notice boards in total when the new one has been installed.

Mulberry Tree – Waiting confirmation that the mulberry tree is the fifth oldest in the country and the oldest in the midlands. It is thought to have been planted in 1605.

Sandwell Model Boat Club – requested permission to use the top pool while their pool in Dartmouth Park is being drained and renovated with the surrounding area. Steve West asked them to put their request in writing and it would be looked at.

Sarah closed the meeting by thanking everyone for coming particularly Bob Badham, Peter Manley all the representatives from BCTV and Hugh Edwards.

Date of the Next Meeting

The Next Meeting will be 2nd April 2007 at 6.45 p.m.