

Mercia Park Community Liaison Group: meeting minutes

6.30pm, 8 June 2021

Attendees

Rick Moore	Chair
Calvin Bent	Clifton Campville Parish Council
Catherine Ridgway	North West Leicestershire District Council
Colin Manifold	Measham Parish Council
Darren Gelder	Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council
Darren Greally*	Stretton en le Field Parish Council
Lindsay Swinfield	Appleby Magna Parish Council
Lucy Morton	Chilcote Parish Council
Mike Ruston	Newton Regis, Seckington & No Man's Heath Parish Council
Peter Snelson	Residents Against Project Mercia
Tony Treadwell	Austrey Parish Council
David Smith	IM Properties
Louise Cotton	Leicestershire & Rutland Community Foundation
Emma Alderman	Winvic
Francis Hayes	Winvic
Heidi Salmons	Winvic
Steve Young	Winvic
Thomas Grantham Wright	BEA Landscape Design Ltd
Nick Trencher	DSV
Robert Burns	DSV
David Lasseter	Jaguar Land Rover
Matt Sutton	Camargue
Giles Venn	Camargue

Apologies

Nigel Eaton	Netherseal Parish Council
Sue Ward	Overseal Parish Council

*Denotes substitute member

1. Welcome and introduction

- The Chair, Rick Moore (RM) started the session, welcoming and introducing those attending for the first time, and thanked everyone for joining the fourth Mercia Park Community Liaison Group (CLG) meeting.
- RM provided a summary of the meeting agenda, noting that there was a particularly busy itinerary, and thanked both presenters and members in advance for aiming to move through their points promptly. He reminded attendees that everyone would be given a fair opportunity to raise questions and for presenters to provide responses.

2. Community Fund

- The Chair handed over to Louise Cotton (LC) from the Leicestershire & Rutland Community Foundation. LC thanked the Chair for the opportunity to present an update on the Community Fund, following the request by CLG members at the last meeting for a better understanding of where and how local villages and communities have benefited from the funding.

- LC confirmed that the first two panels had already awarded a total of £132,218 to 32 organisations from a total of 56 applications received – with grants ranging from £722 up to £10,000. A breakdown was provided regarding the types of projects being supported and their beneficiaries. Examples of projects that have been supported were presented, including: new sheds for the Orchard Allotment Society in Donisthorpe; clearing a pond and reinstating paths for the Coneyberry Millennium Green Trust in Clifton Campville; and improvements for disability access at the local village hall for the Austrey Old School Hall Trust.
- LC also provided a geographical breakdown of the grants awarded, applications received, and applications rejected by area to demonstrate that no specific local authority area was being disproportionately prioritised over others – and equally that the same amount of publicity and correspondence had been shared evenly. LC encouraged all local parishes to continue to promote and support the Community Fund to local organisations to apply.

3. Highways

B5493 diversion follow up

- Heidi Salmons (HS) from Winvic provided an update on behalf of Chris Sherwin, who sent his apologies, regarding the reported issues raised on Appleby Hill following the diversion of the B5493 in January/February.
- HS confirmed Winvic and IM Properties had concluded its investigations and engagement regarding the matter – reemphasising that the details of the diversion routes were all agreed and approved by the highways authorities. Following this, Winvic had no further ability or permission to make any further changes to the diversion routes or to the signage – whether on the diversion or in locations not along the official route including Appleby Hill. Appreciating it can be the case that some local traffic finds alternative routes to official diversions, Winvic did not have the authority to police, enforce or determine which routes people choose to travel on – and that managing this was beyond its reasonable control nor its responsibility.
- HS noted that investigations have concluded that existing, long-term damage to the verges had been caused by vehicles regularly accessing industrial premises, farm accesses, field entrances plus telecommunications sites along the road. Historical maintenance areas also indicate a long-standing issue with vehicle overrun due to localised ad hoc repairs. Leicestershire County Council's Inspection and Enforcement team visited Appleby Hill after the diversion was lifted and confirmed no major concerns. HS noted Winvic has separately confirmed to Warwickshire County Council it will not be covering costs for repairs in this area. Winvic does not feel that it is justifiable or proportionate to undertake or subsidise improvement works, as any additional modest impacts arising as a consequence of the separate short-term B5493 diversion cannot be distinguished from the long-term historical issues.
- Tony Treadwell (TT) of Austrey Parish Council acknowledged HS's statement but said as a resident on Appleby Hill that some of the damage to the verges on the route was not present prior to the B5493 diversion. He stated that near the telecoms mast, the drop at the edge of the roadside was up to nine inches deep. During the closure he observed significantly more traffic using the road causing damage that otherwise would not have occurred. He noted the local authorities were shortly due to be carrying out remediation works along the route.
- HS responded, restating that the traffic routing along Appleby Hill during the B5493 closure was beyond Winvic's control and that it did not have permission or authority to police people's journeys. The Chair intervened and advised that with Winvic's investigations concluded it was unlikely all members were going to reach a consensus on the matter.
- Darren Greally (DG) of Stretton en le Field Parish Council agreed with TT's summation that damage to the Appleby Hill verges had been significant but accepted that this was not Winvic's responsibility and rather that of the local highways authorities – who he hoped would separately managing potential emerging issues to the surface along the A444.

- Peter Snelson (PS) of Residents Against Project Mercia commented that vehicles including car transporters accessed Appleby Hill during the B5493 diversion. Accepting that a decision had been made, he asked Winvic to take responsibility for the additional heavy traffic and consequent damage – remarking that the diversion routes were designed by Winvic’s engineers and agreed by LCC highways, not designed by the highways authorities as implied by Winvic.
- HS responded noting that these issues had been discussed before, reemphasised that any impacts were the result of historical issues, and highlighted that Winvic will always be willing to help out where there’s a case to be made – including the repairs made to the kerbing at No Man’s Heath village hall. The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions but noted that the discussion had gone as far as it could, asking the meeting to move on to the next item.

Junction 11 gyratory improvements / infrastructure works

- Steve Young (SY) introduced himself as Winvic Project Manager and provided an update on highways and infrastructure. SY confirmed that work on the new site entrance had been completed and – subject to surfacing of new footways and street lighting being energised in July – the new access roundabout on the B5493 was also finished. Neither of these elements will require further road closures and the last traffic cones will be removed from the road shortly.
- SY confirmed that on site all earthworks had been completed, that the landscaping, internal site road construction and underground services were 75 per cent finished and the last of the acoustic fences were being installed. He also provided updates on utilities connections to site.
- SY advised that the work on the Junction 11, M42 gyratory had been progressing positively, with the civils work completed. The last of the temporary overnight closures would be required on 11 June. The remainder of the works would be completed via lane closures only to minimise disruption. The new traffic signals will shortly be tested before being signed off by Leicestershire County Council. DGr asked whether the new traffic lights would be operational full time. SY confirmed they would be in place 24/7 once fully installed and switched on.

Sustainable transport

- David Smith (DS) of IM Properties (IMP) introduced an update on the scheme’s sustainable transport strategy. Noting that this was an item that had drawn interest from the CLG previously and that there was potentially a lot of information to share, he proposed that a separate, dedicated session could be held with the project’s transport consultants, DTA, and any interested members on this topic in July.
- DS presented an overview of IMP’s obligations and conditions for sustainable transport. These included: the development of a framework travel plan; a sustainable access and transport strategy (requiring the submission of confirmed bus services); a bus service programme; and individual travel plans for each of the occupiers (DSV and JLR).
- DS gave an update on current actions, including work taking place with DSV – which is set for a phased occupation from September 2021 – demonstrating that most of its demand will be from Tamworth. Three options for a bus service focuses on this area are currently being considered. DS noted that work with JLR, whose occupation of the site will be later into 2022, on its workforce distribution is continuing. The Sustainable Access and Transport Strategy (SATS) will shortly be submitted for approval. This will subsequently mean the phase 1 scheme can be amended to better suit requirements and include other demand areas.
- PS confirmed that he would like to be part of the sustainable transport forum when it meets. He confirmed he was pleased to see Tamworth recognised as a location people were likely to travel from.

- Darren Gelder (DG) of Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council, confirmed he would like to attend the separate meeting and asked what the tipping point would be for other services to be considered from elsewhere. DS reiterated that the Tamworth service would be set up to accommodate the demands from phase one, and that services would be adapted once more is known about the profile of the future workforce.
- The Chair invited Matt Sutton (MS) of Camargue to circulate a note to all members with details about the sustainable transport forum meeting as soon as details were available. MS confirmed dates would be circulated to the CLG.

4. Construction programme

- Francis Hayes (FH), Winvic project manager, delivered an update on construction of the vertical build. The DSV plot is currently on week 33 of 44, with an expected completion in August 2021. Current activities are focused on the mezzanine, floor slab, cladding and roof of the warehouse, internal works and cladding of the cross dock office and internal works and curtain walling of the main office.
- FH provided an update on progress for JLR's build, which is in week 17 of 87 and due for completion in September 2022. Current activity is concentrated on the earthworks, groundworks and drainage for Units 4 and 5 to the north of the site, with the steelwork and cladding going up on Unit 3 to the west.
- HS delivered an update on social value, which among other highlights covered: confirmation that a Mercia Park linked training programme is now available via a free online course run by North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College; a Virtual Insight Day is being held on 8 July for students to learn about the construction industry; the dedicated on site training hub will be up and running from July; and a new Sustainability & Innovation Hub will be opening in late July/early August – which will showcase new technologies being used in the development and provide a space to inspire local students and host educational visits.
- DGr asked whether the facilities would be available to members; HS confirmed that the classroom at the new Hub could be used for the next meeting of the CLG in September subject to any Covid restrictions at the time.

5. Landscaping

- Thomas Grantham Wright (TGW) of BEA Landscape Design Ltd, the project's landscape architect, provided an update on progress of the site's landscaping strategy – further to the request of members at the last CLG.
- TGW confirmed that all of the major earth moving and mounding had finished, and the majority of the planting of 35,000 new trees had been completed, as had most of the bases for the footpaths. Wildflower and ornamental grass preparation and seeding was now taking place, and the new drainage system is up and running to allow water to flow into the balancing ponds and ornamental lake.
- TGW advised that actions to be completed included: remaining tree planting on northern boundary; shrub planting at the main entrance and roundabout; 'on plot' and aquatic landscaping; and finished to the final surfaces of the footpaths.
- TGW noted that a meeting had taken place with No Man's Heath residents and representatives of Residents Against Project Mercia outside No Man's Heath village hall on 28 April 2021, and provided a summary of the discussion. MS confirmed that the minutes from this meeting would be uploaded to the project website. DS confirmed that an action from the meeting for IMP to consider additional offsite planting would take place only once the scheme had been largely completed and allow for the opportunity to take stock and assess the final, approved landscaping and planting scheme.

- PS commented that from the front of the village hall on the B5493 in No Man's Heath the landscaping will have no impact on screening the development. He said at the meeting on 28 April, which he noted was constructive, he asked if IMP would consider consulting the highways authorities about planting on the roadside verges and undertaking long-term maintenance, stating that any planting would need to happen soon to establish.
- Lucy Morton (LM) from Chilcote Parish Council commented that at the moment with the trees still new they are overshadowed by Unit 3. She asked how long it would take for them to reach their full height and screen the views as envisaged in the landscaping strategy. TGW responded that the trees grow at around three feet per year (just under one metre) until they reach their maximum height.
- DGr asked about when the public footpaths around the site would be open for people to use. TGW confirmed that the final surfaces need to be finished before they can be opened up, but that the bases had been signed off by the relevant Footpath Officer. A further update regarding the reopening of the footpaths would be provided at the next meeting.
- DS responded to PS's comment to note that significant consideration had been given to the viewpoints that were presented at the public consultations, which had been agreed by the local authority. He restated that IMP would not seek to consider any additional planting at this time. DS added he would be committed to reviewing the situation as the development completed.
- PS said that a view from the centre of No Man's Heath was never presented at consultation, but rather the closest point on the edge of the village offered a very different view. TGW confirmed 19 viewpoints around the site were considered as part of the planning application and were selected by the local authority from a list of many more options. He accepted PS's point that the centre of the village was not among these but that this was not a primary viewpoint – as most of the nearby buildings are commercial rather than residential. DS noted that at the consultation it was never stated that the whole elevation would be fully screened, but that the most sensitive views were assessed which were agreed by the council.
- PS commented that 10-20 local properties in No Man's Heath as well as at least two more in Chilcote had their views impacted and that not enough consideration had been given to local people who live in the village. TGW noted that Landscape Institute guidance accepts that not every single view can be accounted for and provided further clarification on the definition of a primary view.
- TT asked whether it would be possible to plant a greater number of mature trees around the site to increase screening. TGW responded to explain that the reality is that the smaller trees, or whips, planted around the site grow considerably faster. Mature and semi mature trees tend to take much longer to establish and grow more slowly. Within five to seven years the smaller whips (as they are now) will make up a higher proportion of the tallest trees.
- DGr remarked that a development at scale would always have vistas that needed to be protected irrespective of the types of properties surrounding it. He asked if the whole site was going to be screened and which authorities would be verifying the landscaping strategy had been carried out as approved. TGW restated that IMP had never stated that the whole of the site would be fully screened.

6. Vehicle Activated Signage (VAS)

- The Chair invited Darren Gelder to provide an update on the mobile Vehicle Activate Signage that IM Properties had previously agreed to provide a one-off contribution to purchase, under the understanding it would shared by local parishes.
- DG confirmed that the VAS had now been purchased and that Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council, which will be the custodians of the device, were awaiting delivery, as well as for the post to which it will be temporarily affixed to be replaced.

- DG explained that the unit will be made available to other parishes to use through an application process, subject to them having the correct equipment and carrying out the necessary risk assessments.
- Catherine Ridgway (CR) of North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) commented that parishes will need to ensure the necessary infrastructure was all in place before parishes were able to use the device. DG confirmed that Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council were liaising with Leicestershire County Council's highways department to ensure this and that all loaning the equipment would need to commit to following rules as part of the loan agreement.

7. Any other business

- It was agreed the next meeting of the CLG will take place in September as a face-to-face meeting at Winvic's on site training facility (subject to Covid-19 restrictions).