

Stirchley, the Way Forward

Public meeting 21.3.17 Venue: Stirchley United Club

Minutes: Sean Farmelo

Chair: Chris Tomlinson

Introduction

Chris Stirchley the Way Forward (STWF) – This meeting has been called to discuss the money TESCO have given to the council for spending in Stirchley. This Section 106 money, for the amelioration of disruption caused by developments, amounts to £170,000. There will be a follow up meeting on 4th April to make a decision on the structure of the group that will facilitate the spending. The purpose of this meeting is to introduce members of the community and groups to each other and to share ideas we already have on what to do with the money to benefit everyone.

Sunanda (Stirchley Community Group) In brief last 16 years or so TESCO unsuccessfully trying to build. Not building any more. We are left with a legacy section 106 – £170k to ameliorate damage development was going to do. Council told TESCO they aren't getting it back.

Chris – People who are here representing community groups should now introduce themselves and their groups. The aim is that when we constitute a new group it is going to be representative of the community. From my perspective the most democratic way to do this would be to have pre-existing community groups like the Neighbourhood Forum etc. on the managing committee. It wouldn't be fair for instance to just have hands in a room on an evening on what to spend money on because it could be skewed by who happened to be available on that occasion. It would also be a more thorough way to hash out proper projects if they came through already running organisations.

Introduction to community groups from the area

Stirchley Community Group – worked in 1980s administering the old community centre. After TESCO demolished it we got sidetracked into a Community Asset Transfer trying to run Stirchley Baths. Fairly loose organisation looking for interesting things in future.

Super Stirchley – campaign group resurrected to stop the bowling alley being demolished, no concrete set of followers.

Community market – set up in 2010 partnership between Loaf food co-op and Stirchley Happenings. Used to be in Stirchley United Working Men's Club, moved to Stirchley Baths. Support local traders.

Reclamation – Stirchley artist group – about reclaiming public space. Have been negotiating with TESCO to make their designs for the public realm more beneficial for Stirchley – this has come to nothing. Have had ideas for other projects to engage community. Want to continue. Working with BPM architects on those ideas specifically to do with the triangle.

Stirchley Neighbourhood Forum meet second Monday of each month – bring community together. Place where residents and traders can come and air problems, meetings attended by councillors and police. Keep an eye on planning applications. Try to support new groups. And do the Stirchley Bash.

Friends of Hazelwell park – do work on both sides of the Rea, look at area where travellers' camp is now. Do gardening litter picks and other ways of improving park.

STWF – traders and residents organise various events and Stirchley fête. Background of how we formed is when the BID came to Stirchley and it was voted out. Relevance of that is that if the BID had been formed the money would have gone straight to them, which would have been undemocratic. But now we are in a situation where everyone is able to discuss ideas.

Artefact / Artefact Projects (busy on their refurbishment tonight)

Jigsaw club (Rowena) Thursdays 10-12 Stirchley library

Stirchley Happenings formed in 2009 and then mainly showing films in unusual and underused spaces in Stirchley. We've had a break for a bit.

Stirchley Share – idea is a library of things to borrow items from, to reduce amount of things we all need to have one of. More of an idea at the moment than a defined group.

Stirchley Community Church – been there since 1974 – best line of sight of TESCO. Do youth work, kids work, community cafe. Host meetings. Want to support community.

Library group – last year under threat of closure, have succeeded in saving library, from that success formed Friends of Stirchley Library group. Not constituted yet. Primary objective to gather support, building needs boiler, fundraising, looking at eco solutions for that. Needs roof repairs. Upstairs could help generate income.

History group – Twelve months old– meet once a month at Stirchley Baths. Stirchley has rich heritage and there is lots going on. Want to build archive of Stirchley, trying to keep track of what is going on.

Friends of Stirchley park – not here today but an active group.

Chris - Hopefully this process can allow community to become better connected. Community groups doing projects together can achieve quite a lot.

Questions on the specifics of the grant, what it can and can't be spent on

Fiona (Super Stirchley) – I remember the 106 money was partly supposed to replace the community centre with indoor bowls.

Sunanda - TESCO put £3m in to the baths so don't know if we are getting bowls back – but we do have bowling since planning permission has been denied to Lidl!

Dave (Stirchley Community Group) – need to be realistic with budget. Only 'public realm improvements' within line of sight of the planned superstore will be eligible.

Kerry (Super Stirchley, Community Market, Stirchley Library Group) - line of sight for TESCO building? Because building wasn't built do we have to take that into account i.e how high it would have been?

Cllr Mary Locke – so long as in reasonable distance should be fine.

Susan (STWF) - Wayne Pell the council officer who is responsible for this project told us that while TESCO still own the land it still needs to be spent in line of sight of store area.

Question - can money be spent on land acquisition?

Dave – we were explicitly told no by Wayne.

Sue – We asked what we could do with community asset transfers? Wayne Pell didn't answer directly.

Question – community takeover of say the triangle or constituency office might be possible in that case?

Rose – if people come to the conclusion after the meeting to form a town team (a proposed name for the new group), in a separate issue to the section 106 money, there could be a community asset transfer or we could at least explore that possibility. Specifically with the constituency office that might be good.

James Terry – Have we been given any criteria for what we can't and can spend the money on?

Chris – It can't be spent on purchasing property and it must be used for public realm improvements. Additionally all the local councillors will have to approve of projects which are developed.

James Terry – It's a total disaster round here (the rubble filled site round the club) – we should spend some of the money cleaning it up.

Liam – using money on the TESCO site would be a mistake, even if it looks bad now as it will be developed by someone and they should pay for that.

Sunanda – This 170k is just the start, when the rubble is cleared there will be another tranche of money coming through if we can establish something that is successful. Could get more in future years.

Mary Locke – for now we have the 170k, keep eyes on that for now. Lidl have pulled out, they may build on TESCO's land. Don't know what other funding is out there, other grants which might be available however.

How would the money be given out and administered?

Question - Will the money move from councils purse or will it go to the new group?

Chris – council approached STWF because they had been speaking actively to them about voids. STWF said not fair for us to just have the money and administer it for everyone since there are many other groups representing parts of the community.

Sunanda – council in effect are paying out on the basis of us putting in grant proposals for other things. Aren't going to give all of it in one go – if it is being spent properly then will give more.

Rose (SCG) – mix of both – ideas will need to go through the council but ideas will be administered by the community structure. Councillors have to agree with how the money is being spent.

Mary Locke – It will work a bit like the Local Innovation Fund.

Sue (SCG) – money is sat in BCC bank account and Wayne wants a business plan. Once formed business plan will secure the money for Stirchley preventing it from being diverted into different things. Reason to set up the group is to ensure it comes our way.

Mick (stirchley.co.uk) – whatever money is spent on council will supply their own contractors. Are we capable of supplying or choosing our own contractors?

Rose – asked about it, could try and use local traders people or independent trades people.

Sue – looking at peppercorn rents on constituency office, problem we did have was how much it would cost to do building up with council contractors. Wall of council health and safety and contractors. Need to look at how we can get around that going forward.

What will the new group have to be structured like to administer the grant?

Emma (Reclamation) – Felipe etc. want to reclaim the land, to do public art other things. Wayne said something different that the group would make a bid for the whole of the bid and then the money would be divided up.

Chris – The purpose of having a constituted group is to deal with money – some things will come down to a vote. Most projects will be able to go ahead. Council keen for people in Stirchley to form a group who they can deal with – discussion about what that group should be to get people thinking about how it would work.

Su – We will be able to draw on people's skills – the problem before is that we don't know who the other groups are and who has what skills.

Liz – does the town team need to constitute itself as a group before anything happens? We talked about Stirchley Development Framework in the meeting last night which talks about protecting local buildings and the library. A lot of work went into that plan from residents engaging in consultation. Would these priorities be adhered to?

Chris – from my perspective I don't think the council would be approving spending contradicting the council's own plans. Not much has been decided yet. Council wouldn't just be able to give it to anything though would, have to be a constituted group. We have the very broad restrictions of 'public realm' and 'line of sight' but within that we have a lot of latitude so the expenditure should address local people's concerns.

Ideas which have previously been raised, including at last night's meeting organised by conservative councillors

SCG – looking to develop a conversation area other side of Cartland road.

Friends of Stirchley Library - eco boiler for the library.

STWF - match funding for regeneration of the high street for traders.

- renew access road up to Stirchley United – put signage up on road, put club on map.

- Stirchley constituency office

- lighting along pathway in Stirchley from Hazelwell park up towards Kings Heath.

Discussion on the library and on spending on council property in general

Kat - If we spend the money on the library boiler what obligations do the council have to continue to keep it open? So would we be spending money and then they close it.

Liam- could set a precedent because council own it. We don't want to get into funding things that the council have a responsibility to run.

Theresa (Stirchley Library Group) – could be to encourage council or match funding.

Mary – asked deputy leader of council for a break down of how much it would cost – how much is council willing to put in and what other funding it could get, for instance because it is a listed building. Might be able to get funding from different pots.

Kat – needs to be really carefully thought out if we are funding council buildings.

Theresa – problem is if building isn't repaired then it will close. Opportunity to keep it going is important – agree the council has neglected. Need significant money to attract match funding.

The next library meeting is 29th April 11-1 at church.

Next steps

Emma (arts group) – next step in process?

Liam – Sharing different ideas is good but at some point a decision is going to be made.

Rose – Representatives of different groups would decide.

Roxy (Stirchley Happenings/ Council) – decision making at what point do you think about the budget – everyone is sort of in competition.

Liz – It's up to the council officers to make this work..... there are a lot of groups here 15/16. Can see this becoming continuous discussion. Would like to see decisions made so it's not so convoluted.

Rose – point of forming town team is having reps decision making will be more of a voting kind of process. People in the individual groups can come up and say this would be a good idea. Things can be voted on by that group.

Tom (Stirchley Happenings) – capacity is an issue. Although there are lots of good idea there's no guarantee that people with good ideas will have time to develop them, and that people with worse ideas won't be able to spend lots of time getting them in place. Is it possible to appoint someone to oversee the ideas?

Chris – no information about it. Could say it is possible. Community group were imagining this might be the case.

Tom (Stirchley Happenings) – We need to nail down Wayne Pell as things are unclear, different people being told different things. It's a shame he couldn't be here today.

Kat – What's the deadline?

Rose - Draft business plan has been submitted very draft. Will be circulated. But mainly frills. If community group not formed likely money will go elsewhere.

Chris – It is my personal preference for co-operative structure for the new group.

Mary – Wayne knows some things but saying different things. People can mistakenly get the wrong idea. Community needs to take ownership of the money and have meetings to decide how it is going to work.

Susan – in conversation with Wayne he said he would like to get something in place by September. Also SCG is only a draft proposal to lodge it with him. Main proposal will come from group that is formed. Won't just be one groups idea of what is happening.

Next meeting

Tuesday 4th April, 7:15pm Stirchley United Club