

Decision on hall's future must wait

Bosses at English Heritage have said they will reserve their opinion on the controversial decision to turn Great Barr Hall into a multi-million pound hotel and conference centre until an in-depth review is completed.

The announcement comes after a six-page statement was released locally by Peter Allen, secretary of Great Barr Hall Action Committee, suggesting that English Heritage, among others, supported the application.

But West Bromwich MP, Tom Watson has said that he has been in talks about the Grade II listed building off Chapel Lane with Simon Thurley, chief executive of the English Heritage, who has confirmed they

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are still considering all options for the building and surrounding land.

He said it had also been confirmed that the organisation would be reserving their position on the application until they had been able to review all of the relevant information in the submission.

Mr Watson added: "I am pleased to hear that English Heritage has not made a final decision on the application but will be looking to submit their views soon. There has been a great deal of misinformation circulating that they had formed a view in support of the application." He also said

that the deteriorating condition of both the grade II listed hall and its grade II registered park had long been a cause of concern to English Heritage.

Developers BCG Lakes and Lapworth Architects want to convert the derelict hall, which has stood empty on the Wall-sall-Sandwell border since 1978, into a hotel and conference venue, along with 57 homes.

Michael Lapworth, of Lapworth Architects, has insisted 'robust and extensive' consultation had already been carried out into the £20 million scheme.

Recently more than 150 residents attended a public meeting to discuss the future of the hall after campaigners called for answers from heritage chiefs and the devel-

opers behind the project over the threat to the countryside. Bob Winkle, chairman of the Beacon Action Group who oppose the planning application and who called for the meetings with the developer, said: "I am glad that English Heritage has put some of the rumours to bed, but we are still to hear from the other organisations named in the document and it's causing a lot of confusion among people. It's really important that this process remains transparent and open throughout."

Both the park and the house are included in the organisation's Heritage At Risk Register in the most serious category and Great Barr Hall is listed as one of their priority sites in the West Midlands.

E&S BRIEFING

Ramblers' fear for public footpaths

More than 230 paths are waiting to be recognised as public rights of way in Staffordshire – and if they are not dealt with by 2026 they will be 'lost forever', according to a new report.

Campaign group The Ramblers says the paths will be blocked off if they are not recognised officially as footpaths in the next 12 years. The report revealed more than 4,000 paths are on a waiting list to be determined as legal rights of way in England and the Ramblers estimates this backlog will take more than 13 years to clear if processed at the current rate. Staffordshire County Council has 239 applications, compared to 166 at Warwickshire County Council and 133 at Birmingham City Council.

The group is calling for the Government to simplify rights of way legislation. Ramblers chief executive Benedict Southworth said: "The proposed legislation has been carefully put together by representatives from landowners, paths users, and local government – including ourselves and the NFU – who have worked together for over 3 years to simplify the law around rights of way for the benefit of everyone."



Mr Southworth

Hard work pays off for E&S slimmers

THE BIGGEST LOSER



IT HAS been a month of hard work taking plenty of grit, and determination.

But, as the old saying goes, no pain, no gain.

The four Express & Star readers who were taking part in the Midlands Biggest Loser at Chris Jewkes Fitness, have now lost a total of more than six stone between them.

Mr Jewkes arranged for each of the readers to have their own training programmes and diets tailored to their own needs and goals.

Keith Williams, 41, from Bradley, was the Biggest Loser, managing to shed two stone four pounds over the course of the fitness camp.

He said: "I'm very, very pleased with how much weight I have lost.

"It's a big amount to drop in just a month and shows what you can achieve in a short amount of time when you have got the right people around you. It works wonders for you.

"We have been doing circuit training a lot and I always feel better when I have done it.

"I don't think there is one day when I have left the gym and haven't felt better in myself.

Weight

"Once you have gone in and done it you feel tired but then when you come out you feel 100 per cent different."

Mr Williams said he will now continue to go back to the gym and is having three sessions with a personal trainer a week to continue to lose weight.

But he said having the four contestants has also helped them lose weight.

He said: "All four of us have worked together really well and we are all like-minded people so we have got on well together."

Wendy Draisey, 42, from Fordhouses, said she thought they wouldn't have lost as much weight between them if they had not been working together as a group.

She said: "We've all pushed each other on. We've also had trainers keeping us



Let's get physical – fitness instructor Ellis Bailey with delighted slimmers Jane Gregory, Keith Williams and Wendy Draisey

going so I don't think we would have done as well if we had one-to-one training."

Mrs Draisey has lost 13 pounds since starting and said she is close to fitting into the dress that has been her goal.

She said: "I've already dropped a dress size in trousers but I have this dress that I want to get into.

"I haven't tried it on yet and I've got about half a stone to go to get there, but I hope I can get there in the next two weeks."

Jane Gregory, 50, from Perton, lost 12 pounds, and said she is loving the exercise and is excited for her next physical challenge.

She said: "I am really chuffed with how

much I have lost, having the four of us has made it so much easier. We all walked up the Wrekin last week with Chris Jewkes and a few of his trainers.

"Chris said our next goal is to walk up Snowdon in three months so I'm really looking forward to that.

"This is just the beginning for me. It is the foundations for me to build on and to try and take more weight off."

Incredible

Rob Beaumont lost two stone three pounds and said his transformation has been incredible.

He said: "The big thing for me is I have lost nine inches off my waist. I'm about

a 36 inch or 38 inch wait in trousers and jeans now.

"That means I can start buying normal clothes again which is really just incredible.

"I was kind of the pace setter for our group, so I would definitely say that it worked well for us because it gives you extra motivation.

"I would see someone losing more weight than me and think I needed to do a bit more.

"I can't rate Chris Jewkes' gym highly enough.

"It's really personal and you don't feel like they are trying to sell you something when they tell you things."

Project is helping young to connect

A creative arts project has been helping young people in Sandwell to connect with the wider community.

The Intermix Project, run by youth charity Rathbone and the Odd Theatre Company, brings young people together with artists to explore issues that matter to them in their communities.

Sixteen youngsters took part in Sandwell, and interviewed the public on what they thought about young people and the problems they face, before writing and performing a play about the issues raised.

Hayley Stevens, progression coach for Rathbone in Sandwell, said: "This project aims to raise public awareness on how young people are perceived and also show our learners how negative behaviour affects local people's views of young people."

The artwork created by the young people, and more information, can be found at <http://intermix.uk.com/>

Lisa to start comeback tour at Symphony Hall



Lisa Stansfield

Chart-topping singer Lisa Stansfield will begin her comeback 10-date UK tour in the Midlands, it has been announced.

The star is touring to promote her seventh studio album, Seven, but she will also be performing hits from her 25-year career including number one single All Around The World.

Tickets for the tour, including the first headline show which will be at the Symphony Hall in Birmingham on September 5, go on sale on Friday at 10am.

The 47-year-old singer, from Rochdale, released her last album 10 years ago and has since concentrated on her film career.

Call 0121 780 3333 for more information. and to book tickets.

Appeal for blood donors

Donors are needed to give blood on Monday. Sessions will be taking place from 1.30pm to 3.30pm and from 4.30pm to 7.30pm at The Wodehouse Suite at the Civic Centre in Gravel Hill, Wombourne. Volunteers are advised to book in advance by calling 0300 123 23 23. Visit www.blood.co.uk for more information.

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