

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, 8 OCTOBER, 2014 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT:
Councillors

Spicer, Mrs. A. (Chairman)
Witton, P. (Vice-Chairman)

Bottomer, B.	Snape, P. (substituting
Dean, A.	for C. Anslow)
Hardman, B.	Todd, Mrs. D.M.
Jones, R.	

Also in attendance: Councillor J. Toth (observer)

Invitees: Mrs. S. Dunning – representing Cannock Traders' Association
Mr. I. Hodgson – representing Rugeley Traders' Association

10. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C. Anslow and Mrs. S.M. Cartwright.

Councillor P. Snape was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Anslow.

11. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No other Declarations of Interests were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

12. Minutes

Arising from consideration of the minutes a Councillor referred to Minute 4 and the discussion on S106 monies being used to support the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme. He asked whether any of the S106 monies relating to the Tesco and McDonalds developments could be used to improve the disabled access to the canal towpath. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager advised that most of the Tesco S106 money had been allocated for specific purposes such as the improved link to Rugeley Town Centre. He confirmed that improvements were being made to the towpath and he would investigate whether s106 monies would be used for this purpose.

With regard to Minute 5 a Councillor made reference to the money set aside for conservation works in Rugeley through the Rugeley Partnership Scheme. The LEP Consultant advised that the Council, English Heritage and Staffordshire County Council had invested money into the Rugeley Partnership Scheme and this had been matched by further investment from private investors. A Steering Group had been established which was attended by a number of Councillors. He would ask the Lead Officer to provide further information regarding the Steering Group to Members along with the minutes of the last meeting of the Group.

Arising from Minute 6 the Planning and Economic Development Services Manager commented that a letter had been forwarded to Councillor Mark Winnington (copy included on the agenda) outlining the Rugeley Traders Associations concerns regarding the ongoing road works in Horsefair and inviting him to attend the next meeting to respond. Councillor Winnington had responded to this letter and his response was included on the agenda. This would be discussed later in the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (A) That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July, 2014 be approved as a correct record.
- (B) That further information regarding the Rugeley Partnership Scheme Steering Group be circulated to Members along with the minutes of the last meeting of the Group.

13. Update from Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Holder

The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader (Councillor Mrs. D.M. Todd) provided Members with the following updates for each of the town centre areas:

Hednesford

- The letting of the final unit on Victoria Shopping Park has been agreed with Marie Curie Cancer Care which will be opening in due course. Unfortunately, the recent collapse of Phones 4 You means that their unit is now closed and a new tenant will be sought by the administrators. Two of the new units in Market Street are currently under offer.
- The Council has now received the findings of a car parking survey to assess the use of the Rugeley Road car park. The report concludes that the car park appears to be operating well and that no further restrictions on use are necessary. The findings will inform future discussions on car park management with Aldi.

Rugeley

- The detailed design work to create an enhanced link between the Tesco store and Rugeley Town Centre has been agreed and initial works to replace the kerb stones has been completed. Contractors are now on

site with a programme of works to upgrade the footpath.

- The Rugeley Public Realm works centred on Horsefair have now been completed and will be discussed later on the agenda.

Cannock

- The Cannock Christmas Lights Switch On takes place on Friday 14 November. Once again the Council has approved the use of a small amount of S106 monies to cover some of the costs.
- During July a letter was issued to all those businesses in Cannock Town Centre who have been supported through the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme to encourage them to get involved in the work of Cannock Traders Association. She was interested to hear from the Association if this initiative was followed up and new members recruited.

District-Wide

- Since the last meeting of the Committee a further two applications for support through the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme have been approved. The total number of businesses supported stands at 26. All of the funding secured through the High Street Innovation has now been fully committed. A report is going to the Council's Cabinet later this month to review the scheme and explore the way forward.

14. Town Centre Traders Association Issues

The Chairman welcomed Sheila Dunning, Cannock Traders Association and Ian Hodgson, Rugeley Traders Association to the meeting.

Cannock Traders Association

Sheila Dunning, representing Cannock Traders Association outlined the concerns/issues of Cannock Traders Association. She confirmed that no new members had been recruited to Cannock Traders Association as a result of the letter issued by Councillor Mrs. D. Todd back in July.

She made reference to the Christmas Light Switch On which was taking place on Friday 14 November – the same day as the Friday street market. She explained that on this day other traders were expected to be present in town and there was concern that there would be no room for the Friday street market traders as well.

The LEP Consultant confirmed that the Friday street market would not jeopardise the Christmas Light Switch On event but was mindful that there was an agreement with the market operator to hold the street market in Cannock on a Friday. He would liaise with Mrs. Dunning after the meeting to agree a solution to this matter.

She then raised an issue regarding the new Designer Village at Mill Green. As

there was to be free parking at the Designer Village she asked whether consideration had been given to the free parking in the town centre and whether a free shuttle bus could be provided from Mill Green to the town centre. Traders had concern that they would lose trade to the new outlet and a free bus service would assist in bringing the trade back in to the town centre. The LEP Consultant confirmed that a planning application was expected to be submitted shortly. The issue of connecting the Designer Village to the town centre would be considered as part of the planning process. He suggested that traders may wish to raise this concern as part of the consultation on the planning application.

Reference was made the loss of Dunelm in the town centre and the LEP Consultant suggested that Dunelm's relocation to the Linkway Retail Park had more significance to the trade in the town centre than the impact the Designer Village would have. The Designer Villlage would not be selling many goods that were sold in the town centre. The Committee noted that in towns where Designer Villages have been built the use of the town centres had increased. Cannock would be advertised regionally not just locally as a result of this development and this could benefit Cannock town centre.

Hednesford Traders Association

The Planning and Economic Services Development Manager advised that the representative for Hednesford Traders Association was unable to attend the meeting. However, highway issues had been raised and these were being pursued by Staffordshire County Council Highways. He made reference to a new initiative that Hednesford Traders Association was involved in called Towns Alive. The Association was working with the Town Council and individuals to discuss how the town centre could be better positioned to secure trade and investment in the future. Further information on this initiative may be brought to the Committee in the future.

Rugeley Traders Association

Ian Hodgson, representing Rugeley Traders Association outlined the Associations issues which centred around the road works in Horsefair and the negative effect it had had on their businesses and trade in the town centre. The relevant Officers and Councillors at the County Council had been made aware of the Associations concerns and had been to visit the area. The main issues raised included:

- Concern regarding the cycle signs on the carriageway as they were very confusing – now removed
- The additional parking in the central reservation was difficult to get in/out of and doors opened directly on to the busy highway
- The roads have only been patched and plans were in place to fully resurface Horsefair next year which would cause more disruption
- The delay in completing the scheme – it should have been finished in May
- The loss of trade and footfall in the town centre because of the disruption
- Traders being unable to access their premises due to the presence of contractors vehicles and materials

- The design of the scheme had altered from the original proposals/plans keep changing
- The crossing which allowed access to the Miners memorial had been moved further down the road
- The safety of the scheme in general was questioned and concern that the scheme was not fit for purpose
- The new road layout caused tail backs and there was concern that should the M6 be closed the town would be blocked
- Concern regarding the uneven surface of the pedestrian areas
- Traders needed help and assistance as the town had been crippled by the road works

The LEP Consultant confirmed that the scheme had been designed and managed by Staffordshire County Council. He commented that the Committee was as frustrated as the Rugeley Traders were with the delay in completing the road works in Horsefair and the inconvenience caused. He acknowledged that the Association considered that the works were not fit for purpose and that there were design failures and he would seek a response from the County Council in this respect. The relevant Staffordshire County Council Portfolio Leader, Councillor Winnington had been invited to attend this meeting and he would continue to press this issue. He confirmed that the District Council would continue to support the Traders and attempt to get answers from the County Council.

He referred Members to the letter from Councillor Winnington (enclosed with the agenda) in response to the letter from Councillor Mrs. Spicer and commented that Councillor Winnington had indicated he was happy to attend a meeting but was asking for the District Council's intention with regards to rate reductions and car parking charges. A response would be drafted and the additional information raised by the Traders Association representative would be included to reinforce the need for Councillor Winnington to attend a Committee meeting.

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager referred Members to the issues raised by Councillor Winnington in his letter regarding car parking charges. He commented that this Committee had previously discussed car parking charges and noted that any lost income from a reduction in car parking charges would have to be found elsewhere. He asked the Rugeley Traders Association representative to confirm that the works on Horsefair had less to do with parking charges but more to do with the car parking spaces available. The representative confirmed that the businesses on Horsefair had been affected by the works and had suffered because of the loss of parking spaces and the loss of passing traffic. Although there were now more parking spaces available he questioned whether they were actually safe. He considered that the comments made by Councillor Winnington in response to the letters sent by the District Council outlining the Traders concerns were less than helpful. Although the project was a County Council scheme Councillor Winnington was suggesting that businesses should seek recourse via the District Council. He considered the County Council was passing the problem on to the District Council. He was appreciative of the help and support received from the District Council and the Committee. He also noted that traders who had been affected needed as much help and assistance as possible to get the trade back into the town.

A local Councillor considered that the representative from the Traders Association had covered all the aspects of the problems facing traders. He added that Mark Keeling, the Community Infrastructure and Liaison Manager, had been made aware at the recent Community Forum meeting of the concerns regarding the uneven pedestrian areas and of the concerns regarding the road works in Horsefair and of the safety issues that had now arisen. The Rugeley Traders Association representative considered that the cenotaph in the town centre needed to be assessed as it appeared that there had been some movement in the paving stones surrounding it. It had been suggested that a Staffordshire County Council Highways Officer be invited to walk around the area with a representative from Rugeley Traders to look at solutions to the issues raised but this had not been arranged.

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager made reference to the suggestion from Councillor Winnington that business rates for businesses in Horsefair be reimbursed as way of compensation for the disruption from the road works. He questioned whether this suggestion was the correct vehicle for compensating businesses. However, he advised that of the 40 businesses on Horse Fair, 22 pay business rates and 18 do not pay rates as they qualify for small business rate relief. Therefore Councillor Winnington's suggestion to use business rates as a vehicle for compensation would not work as 45% of businesses do not pay rates. Councillor Winnington would be advised accordingly in the response letter that would be forwarded to him.

The Chairman allowed Councillor Toth, who was in attendance as an observer, to speak. He commented that the response to Councillor Winnington should abdicate any responsibility from the District Council. He considered that Councillor Winnington should be asked to attend a meeting along with Rugeley Traders to question him over the issues raised regarding the scheme and the negative effect on businesses and trade. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager confirmed that Councillor Winnington had indicated he was happy to attend a meeting but it may be that dates of forthcoming Town Centre Regeneration PDC meetings would need to be altered to accommodate his attendance. The Committee noted that although he had been invited it was not possible to insist that he attended.

The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader advised that she had visited Rugeley to assess the works undertaken and considered that the scheme that had been delivered was different to the scheme that had been proposed. She questioned why the plans had been changed. She was also concerned with some safety issues with the scheme as it was difficult to see the difference between the pedestrian areas and the road.

RESOLVED:

- (A) That the comments of the Cannock Traders Association representative be noted and the LEP Consultant liaise with Sheila Dunning to arrange a date to discuss a solution to the concern raised in relation to the Cannock Christmas light switch on and the Friday street market.

- (B) That the additional information and comments made by the representative from Rugeley Traders Association and Members in relation to the roadworks in Horsefair and the effect on businesses and trade be noted.
- (C) That a letter be forwarded to Mark Keeling, Community Infrastructure Liaison Manager requesting that a walk around the town centre be arranged with the representative from Rugeley Traders Association to highlight the highway concerns in the town centre.
- (D) That a letter be sent to Councillor Winnington (with a copy to the Leader of Staffordshire County Council) outlining the additional information and comments made by the representatives of the Traders Association and Members at today's meeting and inviting him to attend a meeting of the Town Centre Regeneration PDC to respond to these concerns.
- (E) That the letter include a response to Councillor Winnington's suggestion regarding rate reductions and car parking charges.
- (F) That the Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader advises Cabinet of the issues and concerns raised with regard to this matter.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from the Traders Associations for attending the meeting.

15. Work Programme Review

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager referred Members to the Work Programme for 2014-15 (Item No. 6.1 – 6.2). He advised that the Part 2 item was included on the next two meetings to discuss the future of the District's Town Centres. Any specific issues raised would be addressed and any requests to invite representatives would be arranged.

Members noted that performance monitoring information would be included at the next meeting as the information had been considered at Scrutiny on 6 October, 2014.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

16. Exclusion of Public

RESOLVED:

That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended).

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PART 2

17. The Future of the District's Town Centres – Car parking issues

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager advised that Ian Tennant, Head of Housing and Waste Management and Steve Schofield, Senior Technical Officer had been invited to the meeting to provide information on the 10p after 3pm trial in relation to the Avon Road car park in Cannock and the Forge Road car park in Rugeley. The Committee noted that there appears to have been some beneficial impact from the initiative but were mindful of the need to fully consider the financial implications for the Council. The views of the Committee would be related to Cabinet via a report the Head of Housing and Waste Management would be preparing.

The use of all car parks in town centres was discussed and the Committee noted that the recession had had a huge impact on their use. The LEP Consultant suggested that Members may wish to recommend that Cabinet look at the way car parking charges are levied to ascertain if there was a way to maintain the budget and support the competitiveness of the town centres. Members supported this suggestion.

Other Issues - Investment Schemes

The LEP Consultant explained that GVA had been commissioned to produce a report highlighting the potential investment opportunities in Cannock town centre. The report was still in production.

A Councillor made reference to an empty unit in Rugeley town centre which was affecting the visual image of the town centre. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager asked that the Councillor provide him with the location/address and he would ask the Council's Planning Enforcement Officer to investigate.

The LEP Consultant referred to the Forum Shopping Centre in Cannock and advised that it had recently been taken over and was under new management.

RESOLVED:

That the information on the 10p after 3pm trial be noted and the Cabinet report include a recommendation to look at the way car parking charges are levied to ascertain if there was a way to maintain the budget and support the competitiveness of the town centres.

The meeting closed at 5.25 pm.

CHAIRMAN