

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, 8 OCTOBER, 2013 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

PART 1

PRESENT:
Councillors

Spicer, Mrs. A. (Chairman)	
Ball, G.D. (Vice-Chairman)	
Allt, Mrs. A.	Jones, R.
Anslow, C.	Todd, Mrs. D.M.
Grice, Mrs. D.	Whitehouse, Mrs. L.

Also present with the agreement of the Chairman:
Councillor C. Bennett, (Environment Portfolio Leader) for agenda item no. 6.

The Chairman advised that the order of the agenda would be amended and item 6 would be considered after item 3.

10. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

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

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 August, 2013 be approved as a correct record subject to Councillor G.D. Ball being listed as having submitted his apologies for the meeting.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration confirmed that with regard to Minute No. 6 (Town Centre Traders Association Issues) representatives from Staffordshire County Council would be invited to attend the next meeting to provide an update following the conclusion of the consultation in respect of Rugeley Public Realm Project.

In response to a question raised with regard to Minute No. 9, the Planning and

Economic Development Services Manager advised that the planning permission for the new Tesco store in Rugeley included a number of adjacent retail units with consent for food and drink uses. However, due to the lack of retailer demand, the agents acting on behalf of Tesco had advised that this part of the scheme would not be implemented at the current time.

13. Car Parking

The Head of Planning and Regeneration referred Members to the Weekday Car Parking after 3.00pm report enclosed with the agenda which was considered by Cabinet on 19 September, 2013. The report proposed that a pilot scheme to provide weekday car parking after 3.00pm at a 10 pence nominal charge be introduced on the Avon Road, Cannock and Forge Road, Rugeley car parks for a six month period from January 2014. He advised that research that had been undertaken with other Local Authorities had concluded that it was difficult to predict the impact of such an initiative; however, Cabinet had considered that a pilot scheme was worthy of trialling.

Councillor Bennett, the Environment Portfolio Leader was present at the meeting for this item. He commented that this issue had been raised at Council a few months ago. The proposal was aimed at attempting to increase trade in the town centres after 3.00pm. He confirmed that the 10 pence nominal charge would assist in monitoring the success of the scheme. If the scheme were to be introduced before Christmas it would impact further on the budget. He advised that the Council was providing two free car parking days on the two Saturdays before Christmas. The pilot scheme would run for six months from January and if it was not successful or viable it would be withdrawn.

In response to questions from Members, Cllr Bennett confirmed that he was not in favour of introducing the scheme before Christmas as it would be difficult to monitor the effect of the scheme due to the car parks being used more frequently in the run up to Christmas. Additionally, there were budget implications to consider if the scheme were to be introduced sooner.

Councillor Anslow commented that the period being suggested for the pilot scheme was the worst trading time for businesses. He considered that the scheme would not increase trade as there was no reason for shoppers to visit the town centres. He was of the opinion that the Committee needed to focus on providing better quality businesses in the town centres. He sought confirmation on why car parking charges did not apply Hednesford town centre. It was explained that Hednesford Town Council paid for the provision of CCTV on the agreement that car parking charges would not be introduced in Hednesford.

Councillor Mrs. Grice commented that residents of Hednesford effectively paid for car parking through their rates as the Town Council had an agreement with the District Council to pay for CCTV in exchange for free parking. She advised that Rugeley Town Council could do a similar thing.

Councillor Bennett agreed that better quality businesses were required in the town centres; however, it was extremely difficult to attract high end retailers. He commented that the revenue from car parking charges was high and if this were to reduce there would be an impact on the provision of other services. He considered

the proposed pilot scheme was the best scheme available given the circumstances.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration confirmed that part of the resolution of Cabinet was to ask the Committee to consult with the Cannock and Rugeley Traders Associations regarding the proposed pilot scheme. Consultation had taken place and Cannock Traders Association had raised concern regarding the time of 3.00pm as they considered this to be too late to introduce the reduced charges. Additionally they considered that no charge would be more beneficial and the introduction of free parking on town centre event days would also be useful.

With regard to Rugeley Traders Association a letter had been received from a member of the Traders Association commenting on the proposal. However, it was not clear if these views represented the view of the Rugeley Traders Association; confirmation was awaited. This letter confirmed that 3.00pm was considered to be too late to introduce the reduced rate and 12 noon would be more appropriate. Alternatively a bigger incentive would be to introduce parking for four hours for £1.00. A comment had also been made that the scheme should be introduced before Christmas.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that Mary Portas, in her review of town centres, had suggested the 3.00pm time. She considered it offered an incentive to attract people in to the town centres at a quiet time which would be an extra boost to trading. The Cabinet report reflects the suggestion of Mary Portas. He further reminded the Committee that any extension to the reduced car parking charges would have an impact upon the Council's financial position.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Planning and Regeneration confirmed that there was an existing agreement with Hednesford Town Council whereby they paid for CCTV and parking in Hednesford remained free of charge. However, no similar arrangement was in place elsewhere in the District.

Councillor Jones expressed the concerns of the Rugeley Traders who were disappointed the pilot scheme was not being introduced until January 2014. They considered that the run up to Christmas was their best trading period and had concern that the new Tesco store and the road improvements at Horsefair would have an impact on the trade in the town centre. They had suggested that the pilot scheme should be introduced from 1 December, 2013.

Councillor Mrs. Todd made reference to the two free car parking days on the two Saturdays before Christmas and considered that this would help boost trade in the town centres. However, Councillor Anslow was of the opinion that the majority of shoppers will have already done their Christmas shopping prior to these two Saturdays.

There was a discussion on the trade in Hednesford; in particular this centred on whether trade was improving since the Tesco store had opened. Councillor Whitehouse explained that she was a trader in the town centre and did not consider there had been a huge increase in footfall since the opening of Tesco. She said that the town goes quieter after 2.00pm. She considered that the town needed new retailers, events and markets so as to attract customers.

After a lengthy debate the Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that, although the resolution of Cabinet was before the Committee for amendment, the Environment Portfolio Leader had been present and had noted the views of Members.

AGREED:

That the report on Weekday Car Parking after 3.00pm along with the decision of Cabinet in respect of the report be noted.

14. Update from The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Holder Councillor Mrs. D.M. Todd

The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader provided the Committee with the following update:

Hednesford

- Marketing of the remaining units on Phases 1 and 2 continues. The most recent letting is to Pure Gym as a result of their decision to take the unit beneath the Aquarius subject to securing planning permission. Other potential lettings are still being negotiated.
- The Council is continuing a dialogue with Aldi to address a number of issues associated with the management of their part of the Rugeley Road Car Park. As reported at the previous meeting of the Committee, any future decisions relating to the introduction of car parking management arrangements such as Parking Eye, will involve consultation with key stakeholders.

Rugeley

- The new Tesco store in Rugeley opened on 26 September and reports suggest that it is trading well. Over 250 jobs have been created as a consequence of the opening, and as reported at the last meeting over a quarter of the jobs have been taken by local people who were previously unemployed.

Cannock

- The environmental improvements project in Cannock town centre continues with Improvements and repairs nearing completion to the subway linking Beecroft Road car park with the town centre. The Underpass Project has been facilitated by a number of local groups and organisations and will produce a much enhanced connection to the main shopping area. The subway will be closed later today for a second and final night to allow for resurfacing work to take place.
- On 11 September a Press Statement was issued by the Council concerning the outcome of the recent consultation to explore options to enhance the retail and leisure offer in Cannock Town Centre centred through development of the Beecroft Road car park. The Statement indicated that taking into account the difficult economic conditions, the lack of national retailer interest and the fact that there is not majority support from the public consultation for the

development, the Leader of the Council would be recommending Cabinet not to pursue the development further at this stage. In the short term the Council will continue to improve the retail offer in Cannock Town Centre through existing programmes and initiatives with partner agencies and organisations. The statement also included a commitment to ensure that the Council has ambitious plans to improve its town centres. Cabinet will consider a report on such matters next week.

District-Wide

- It is 12 months since The Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme was launched and funding is still available to businesses looking to either expand or occupy currently empty properties in Cannock, Hednesford or Rugeley Town Centres. To mark the first anniversary of the Scheme's launch a Press Release was issued earlier today. To date 14 businesses have been assisted and approximately £70,000 of the £100,000 the Council secured from the High Street Innovation Fund has been committed. A further two applications are pending. The Scheme has also been instrumental in reducing the number of vacant units in the District's three town centres as the most recent data reported to this Committee shows. Unfortunately, this positive news was recently misreported in the local press. It was hoped that the Press Release issued today will be reported accurately and will help to set the record straight.
- Finally, the Cabinet have recently considered a report outlining proposals for revised car parking charges in Cannock & Rugeley Town Centres during weekday afternoons. The Committee have expressed their views on this issue in the discussion earlier in the meeting.

Councillor Anslow sought confirmation of the type of businesses that had applied for the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager could recall that of two applications recently received – one for Rugeley and one for Cannock – one was for a clothing retailer, [subsequently confirmed that the second application was also for a clothing retailer]. He confirmed there was a healthy interest in the scheme.

15. Town Centre Traders Association Issues

The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained that the representatives of the town traders associations had been invited to the previous meeting to raise any issues of concern / significance in respect of the individual town centres. These concerns had been highlighted within the minutes.

He commented that the traders in Hednesford and Rugeley had said that they had few issues with how things were progressing in their town centres. Hednesford traders were seeing the benefits of the regeneration scheme and Rugeley traders were welcoming the money being spent on improving the town centre, including the Rugeley Public Realm Project with its commitment to spend £500,000. However, they did have reservations regarding the timing of the proposed works and their limited ability to influence the final design.

Specific matters that were raised at the previous meeting are detailed below together with the progress discussed in the meeting:

Rugeley – Concern was expressed at the apparent lack of meaningful consultation by the County Council in respect of the Rugeley Public Realm Project.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration confirmed that SCC representatives have been invited to attend the PDC and provide an update following conclusion of the consultation.

Hednesford – Concern that the Co-op car park was being used by people using the railway rather than functioning as a shoppers car park.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the outstanding issue regarding the control regime on the Aldi car park would provide a benchmark against which stakeholders could consider the future of the Co-op car park.

Concern that even the 40 mins extended waiting time in Market Street may be insufficient.

The extended on-street parking period could be reviewed in due course.

Desire to introduce a more diverse visitor/shopper offer in Hednesford, perhaps including different types of shops, plus restaurants, wine bars etc, and the possibility of bringing specialist markets to the town.

Not considered further at this meeting.

Cannock – A wide range of concerns had been raised. More to be done to invest in and expand Cannock's retail offer. Other concerns that were frequently expressed to Mrs. Dunning included the levels of rent charged; car parking charges; and competition from new businesses offering similar lines.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained again that the Council owns very few shops in the town centre and the ability to reduce rents was limited. The Council's Business Rates Discount Scheme had supported new and expanding traders .

The introduction of the reduced after 3.00 pm trial had been debated earlier. Cabinet would be considering shortly the report on the development of the Beecroft Road car park site.

The Committee was advised that the representatives from the traders association would be invited to attend the next meeting.

Councillor Mrs. Whitehouse asked whether there had been any progress regarding the scheme to increase the waiting time on Market Street, Hednesford from 20 to 40 minutes. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager advised that this was a County Council process and he understood that the scheme would shortly be advertised, and, subject to there being no objections, could be in force before Christmas.

16. Work Programme Review

The Head of Planning and Regeneration referred Members to the Committee's Work Programme for 2013-14 (Item 7).

He confirmed that at the next meeting on 3 December, 2013 representatives from Staffordshire County Council would be invited to attend to provide an update on the conclusion of the consultation on the Rugeley Public Realm Scheme.

He further advised that at the meeting on 12 March, 2014 the Committee would receive a partial review of the reduced weekday car parking pilot scheme. A full review would not be possible given that the scheme ran until June, 2014.

AGREED:

That the Work Programme for 2013-14 be noted.

8. 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).

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, 8 OCTOBER, 2013 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK
PART 2

9. Discussion on Town Centre Issues

The Head of Planning and Regeneration made reference to the press statement regarding the Cabinet's decision to not progress the development scheme in relation to the Beecroft Road car park site. He confirmed that other redevelopment opportunities around Cannock would continue to be considered.

The Committee was advised that Cabinet would be considering a report later in October regarding the consultation exercise undertaken in respect of the Beecroft Road car park site where the views of residents and local people had been sought. This would be brought to the Committee following consideration at Cabinet. The feedback from this consultation was positive and a number of ideas had been suggested. In general feedback suggested support for improving the existing town centre rather than a redevelopment scheme on the Beecroft Road car park site.

The Committee discussed a number of potential redevelopment sites. The Head of Planning and Regeneration also reported on a number of other 'in centre' initiatives including the Business Rates Discount Scheme and potential opportunities for markets in the town centres.

Members were then invited to make suggestions of potential development opportunities or sites within the town centres that would assist in boosting trade.

Members discussed possible ideas for developing the town centres and particular reference was made to the lack of use of the multi storey car park. Reference was also made to opportunities in the area occupied by the Prince of Wales Theatre and market.

Members considered that venues such as the Prince of Wales Theatre added diversity to the town centre. The Prince of Wales Theatre added a culture element to the town centre and this boosted the trade for the café/bars in the town centre. The idea of boosting the evening economy was a possible way of improving the town centres.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that a Retail Survey had been undertaken in 2009 to identify where residents were shopping. He confirmed that this was due to be refreshed next year which would assist benchmarking the District's centres. Although discount type retailers were required in the town centres Members considered it important to identify ways of attracting quality retailers into the town

centre.

In response to the debate the following are identified as items for this part of the Committee's agenda:

- Future redevelopment opportunities;
- Ideas for improving the attractiveness of the existing centres;
- The multi-storey car park and adjacent area in Cannock town centre;
- Initiatives for reducing vacant business units in the town centres;
- Car parking issues;
- Research and future changes for the Districts town centres.

The meeting finished at 5.20 p.m.

CHAIRMAN