

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, 28 AUGUST, 2013 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK
PART 1

PRESENT:
Councillors

Spicer, Mrs. A. (Chairman)

Grice, Mrs. D.	Todd, Mrs. D.M.
Jones, R.	Whitehouse, Mrs. L.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman welcomed representatives from the town centres traders' organisations:

Mrs. S. Dunning (Cannock); Mr. D. Wiseshall (Hednesford); and Mrs. A. Cooney (Rugeley).

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs. A. Allt and Mrs. S.M. Cartwright.

2. 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.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March, 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

4. The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio

Consideration was given to the Economic Resilience Priority Development Plan Outturn for 2012-13 (Item 4.1 – 4.3). The Head of Planning and Regeneration spoke of the positive outcomes and referred Members to the end of year case study (Item 4.3), highlighting Tesco Partnerships, which had created employment opportunities for local people in the new Hednesford store and the soon to open Rugeley store.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration then took Members through the key points of

the Economic Resilience Priority Delivery Plan 2013-14 (PDP) (Item 4.4 – 4.25), and gave a short presentation in respect of the Town Centre Regeneration element of the PDP and, in particular, the “Improve town centres through regeneration and management” service aim.

Members and Traders’ representatives commented on several aspects of the 2013-14 Plan, and the presentation:

- **Miners’ Memorial on Globe Island** - Concern was expressed at potential road safety issues. The concerns were acknowledged, but Members’ were advised that the PDC meeting was not the appropriate place for such a discussion, as the Planning Control Committee had already made a determination in that regard.
- **Beecroft Road site** – In response to an enquiry as to whether any marque stores had shown an interest in the site, the Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the market testing work commissioned by the Council had shown there to be limited interest from retailers at this time. The development proposals matter was still out to public consultation (ending on 30 August), and this would determine the views of the public towards investing further and seeking interest from potential developers.
- **Town centre vacant units monitoring** – The Head of Planning and Regeneration explained the proposal in the PDP to monitor as a ‘key indicator’ the number of vacant ground floor units in the town centres’ principal shopping streets with the aim of achieving a reduction over time. A presentation to the PDC compared the number of vacant units in all three of the District’s town centres between June 2012 and June 2013. The results showed an improving trend with a reduction overall of 7 units. The biggest reduction was in Rugeley with 8 fewer vacant units. The only increase was in Hednesford and this was the direct result of 7 new shops in Market Street, built as part of the regeneration scheme, which had recently been completed and become available for letting.
- The Head of Planning and Regeneration invited views on the logic behind the allocation of the streets included in the street plans as being the ones that formed the principal shopping streets for comparison purposes. Views were sought, particularly of the traders’ association representatives, about the extent of the areas covered by the plans.
 - **Cannock** – it was agreed that the area identified was largely representative subject to the extent of the units to the rear of High Green being reviewed. The number of vacant units was queried, particularly with regard to Wilkinsons. The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the comparison was made as at June, 2012 and June, 2013, and he was pleased to be able to confirm that Wilkinson’s had announced a lease extension to 2015. With regard to other traders that were mentioned as potentially leaving the town centre, he had spoken recently with the management of Cannock Shopping Centre, and there was no indication from them that this information was accurate.
 - **Hednesford** – it was suggested that the area should be extended at the Rugeley Road end of the town to include Aldi and the other traders on that development, to the new units on Victoria Street including Tesco, and also The Lightworks. The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the ground floor street front units in The Lightworks were included, but not the others

within it, which were of mixed use.

- Rugeley – it was considered that part of Horsefair, Brewery Street, and the units in Anson Street closest to Lower Brook Street should also be included.
- Traders' representatives and Members both commented that, as a result of regeneration in and on the outskirts of the centres, the first signs of recovery were being shown in Hednesford and Rugeley.
- A member commented that parking costs were an issue in Cannock and Rugeley town centres and he enquired if any further thought had been given to reducing / removing parking charges to encourage shoppers in. The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the question of free car parking after 3.00pm had been raised at a recent Council meeting and a report was due to be taken back to Cabinet in September 2013.

AGREED:

That the Economic Resilience Priority Development Plan Outturn for 2012-13 (Item 4.1 – 4.3), and the Economic Resilience Priority Development Plan 2013-14 (Item 4.4 – 4.25), be noted.

That the key indicator for the service aim of 'Improved Town Centres through Regeneration and Management' be agreed as *to achieve a reduction in the number of vacant ground floor units in the District's principal town centre shopping streets.*

That the revised boundaries of the principal shopping streets in the District's three town centres be used for future vacant units comparison purposes.

5. 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 continued. The most recent letting was to Discount UK who had started trading in June. Their opening had contributed to an increase in footfall in the area between Tesco and Market Street. Other potential lettings were still being negotiated.
- The new Aldi store on Rugeley Road had opened on 1 August and marked the completion of building work associated with the Hednesford Town Centre Regeneration Programme which had started in April, 2011.
- The Council was working with Aldi to address a number of issues associated with the management of their part of the Rugeley Road car park. As a consequence, Aldi had agreed to defer the introduction of Parking Eye until the use of the car park had been fully evaluated. Any future decisions relating to the introduction of car parking management arrangements such as Parking Eye, would involve consultation with key stakeholders.
- Aquarius Ballroom and Banqueting Suite - The lease between Mike Allsopp and

the Council was signed in June, thus allowing the replacement to the Aquarius to open its doors to the public. The Portfolio Leader was pleased that Mr Allsopp had decided to retain the Aquarius name for the new facility.

Rugeley

- Work on the new Tesco store in Rugeley was nearing completion and an official opening was earmarked for the week commencing 16 September. Power Station Road had now reopened following its closure since early June to allow construction of a new roundabout to access the development.
- Recruitment for the new Tesco store was also nearing completion. The Council had been working with Tesco, JobCentre Plus and Work Solutions to maximise job opportunities at the new store including positions for previously unemployed local people through Tesco Partnerships. A Press Release concerning the Tesco Partnerships recruitment would be issued within the next few days.
- Staffordshire County Council were consulting on the introduction of public realm improvements in the corridor between Globe Island and Rugeley Town rail station. The District Council was encouraging the County to expand the public realm works to include the planned improvements to link the town centre to the new Tesco store via the canal bridge at Leathermill Lane.
- Reduced car parking charges were introduced on St Joseph's Church Car Park on 3 June in response to discussions at previous PDC meetings and comments from Rugeley Traders Association. It was too early to assess whether this had generated an increased use of the car park.

Cannock

- An initial programme of environmental improvements had been carried out in Cannock Town Centre which included replacement of all litter bins, repainting metal street furniture and bollards and replanting raised beds in various locations. Improvements and repairs would soon be implemented to the subway linking Beecroft Road car park with the town centre.
- A public consultation on future proposals for the Beecroft Road Car Park was due to end on 30 August. The consultation has involved street interviews as well as an on-line survey to obtain public opinion on the Council's proposals to secure new investment in Cannock Town Centre.

District-Wide

- The Council had made financial provision in the budget for 2013-14 for a continuation of work through the Town Centres Improvement Fund. An Action Plan outlining expenditure in all three of the District's Town Centres had been agreed.
- The Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme was still available to businesses looking to either expand or occupy currently empty properties in Cannock, Hednesford or Rugeley Town Centres. To date, 13 businesses had been assisted and approximately £60,000 of the £100,000 the Council secured from the High Street Innovation Fund had been committed.
- Finally, the District's town centres were not alone in facing the challenge of reduced expenditure and increased competition, particularly from online retailing. In response to concerns about these difficulties raised by Members of the Council and stakeholders in the town centres, the Portfolio Leader had suggested that the

Town Centre Regeneration PDC be used as the primary vehicle for the debate about how to improve the performance of the district's town centres. Subject to the Committee's agreement, the Work Programme would be amended to take this into account.

The Town Centres Traders' representatives sought clarification in respect of qualification for the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme. The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that it was open to new or expanding retail businesses.

Members enquired about uptake in respect of the Community Toilet Scheme. The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that, to date, only one business – in Rugeley – had entered an agreement with the Council. Although there had been expressions of interest from others, unfortunately, their premises were not suitable, because toilets tended to be on the first floor and not immediately accessible. Mr. Wisehall confirmed this was the case in Hednesford. The Head of Planning and Regeneration reminded the Committee that the Hednesford redevelopment had always included an agreement that the Tesco store would make its customer toilets available to the public during its hours of opening (24 hrs per day during the week).

AGREED:

That the Town Centre Regeneration PDC be used as the primary vehicle for the debate about how to improve the performance of the district's town centres, and the Work Programme be amended to take this into account.

6. Town Centre Traders Association Issues

The Head of Planning and Regeneration invited the representatives of the town traders associations to raise any issues of concern / significance in respect of the individual town centres.

The consensus amongst the Town Centres Traders' representatives was that, generally, they had few concerns at that time, the improvement works in Cannock and Rugeley were supported and the regeneration scheme in Hednesford had been well received. Specific matters that were raised were as detailed below:

Rugeley – It was acknowledged that, generally, communication between the traders and the District and County Councils had improved, but concern was expressed at the apparent lack of meaningful consultation by the County Council in respect of the Rugeley Public Realm Project. Particular concerns included the narrowed highway; volume of traffic; and perceived danger as a result of including parking bays in a central reservation area.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration acknowledged the traders' concerns, and suggested that it would not be unreasonable to invite SCC representatives to attend the PDC and provide an update following conclusion of the consultation.

Hednesford – It was acknowledged that there appeared to be positive benefits to

The Head of Planning and Regeneration noted that the parking issues should be

increasing the maximum waiting time on Market Street from 20 to 40 mins. However, this was still not sufficient if someone was going to the hairdressers, for example. It was suggested that the general parking situation would be improved if the 4 hrs parking limit on the car park to the rear of the Co-op was enforced. As it was, it appeared that the majority of those using it were parking all day and travelling on the train.

With regard to public realm schemes, Mr. Wisehall advised that he had been impressed by the one in Poynton, Cheshire, and he believed something similar could work well in Hednesford, though he couldn't comment on Horsefair, Rugeley.

The traders would like to see a more diverse visitor/shopper offer in Hednesford, perhaps including different types of shops, plus restaurants, wine bars etc.

Finally, they were looking at the possibility of bringing specialist markets to the town.

Cannock – Generally, matters had been covered during the course of the meeting. Mrs Dunning was concerned that, compared to Hednesford, Cannock needs more to be done to invest in and expand its 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. By way of example, it was noted that Cannock had several card shops, while Hednesford had a number of hairdressers.

reviewed along with the Aldi car park matter.

The Council would support the aim to build on the success of the regeneration scheme to encourage a more diverse visitor experience as a future aim for Hednesford centre.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that very few town centre shops were owned by the Council and rents were a matter for negotiation with landlords.

The issue of car parking charges was, in part, the subject of a pending report to Cabinet, but he would also add it to the work programme for 2013-14.

With regard to competing businesses offering similar lines, the Council had no powers in this regard, and through 'healthy competition' the market tended to sort itself out.

7. Provisional Work Programme

Consideration was given to the Committee's Work Programme for 2013-14 (Item 7.1). The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised Members that the programme was very similar to the previous year, but that, picking up on matters discussed, he would add in discussion on car parking; and town centre issues (general and specific); the latter to be included as a standing Part 2 item to enable discussion of matters that might be of a commercially sensitive nature, if required.

AGREED:

That, subject to the inclusion of car parking; and town centre issues, the Work Programme for 2013-14 be noted and agreed.

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).

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PART 2

9. Discussion on Town Centre Issues

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the majority of matters had already been reported / discussed. In addition:

Cannock

The Council was in dialogue with the owners of The Forum and Cannock Shopping centre. Both were in more positive positions than had been the case recently, and were in negotiations with existing and potential leaseholders about shop units.

The current position of the former “Avon Plaza” scheme was discussed.

Hednesford

The remaining vacant unit on the Victoria Shopping Park was to be split in two.

In response to concerns expressed by Members and traders in respect of anti-social behaviour and the need for a Police linked “Store Net” radio scheme or similar, the Head of Planning and Regeneration suggested that such a scheme could be considered using funding support available through for example, S.106 or the Local Strategic Partnership.

Rugeley

As previously reported, the new Tesco store was due to open in September and the Tesco Partnerships would be holding a “graduation ceremony” on Friday for its new intake of staff.

Members enquired if it was known what other businesses might be taking over the other units on site, and if Tesco had been encouraged to engage with the Rugeley Traders Association.

The meeting finished at 5.50 p.m.

CHAIRMAN