

**CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**  
**WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH, 2014 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.
Cartwright, Mrs. S.M.	Whitehouse, Mrs. L.M.

**34. Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs. D. Grice.

**35. 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.

**36. Minutes**

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 December, 2013 had been included on the agenda (although already approved at the meeting on 27 February, 2014) so that Members could view the comments made by the Traders Associations.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December, 2013 approved at the meeting on 27 February, 2014 be noted.

**37. 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**

- Marketing of the final unit on Victoria Park and the small units at the end of Market Street continued. To date, there has been limited interest in the Market Street units.
- Pure Gym opened last month after an extensive fit-out. The opening was helping to increase footfall along the frontage of the terrace next to Tesco and through to Market Street.
- The Parking Order on the Council's section of the Rugeley Road Car Park has now been in place for three months and has helped to deter vehicles being parked for long periods of time. A similar 4 hr limit is currently being enforced on Aldi's section of the car park. Aldi have indicated that they may need to introduce more extensive restrictions in the future because of the high demand for spaces during the period from lunchtime through to mid afternoon.

## **Rugeley**

- Improvements are currently being carried out along Forge Road as part of a programme of work to create an enhanced link between the Tesco store and Rugeley Town Centre.
- The Council are supporting a privately organised monthly street market the first of which was held at the end of February. The next market, with an emphasis on farmer's produce and crafts, was due to take place on 22 March.
- The second phase of the Rugeley Public Realm improvements was continuing between Globe Island and Wharf Road. The work was due for completion next month.
- The Rugeley Partnership Scheme was now nearing the end of the third and final year. So far two properties have been completed and a feasibility study has been supported on a third property. Improvements are now underway on the third property and a second feasibility study has been commissioned. There was active interest in improvements to a further five properties which would need to be confirmed by the end the month.

## **Cannock**

- The weekly Cannock street market was continuing each Friday and was due to run until the end of May. Its impact would be evaluated and Cabinet would need to consider whether or not it, or something similar, should continue.
- The Crown Post Office has now relocated to WH Smith. Discussions would be held in the near future with the owners of the vacated property to establish their intentions.

- The Council was contributing to a jointly commissioned piece of research which should help to guide future investment decisions in Cannock Town Centre. The need for this work was identified last year when the decision not to proceed with the Beecroft Road proposals was confirmed.

### **District-Wide**

- Since the last meeting of the Committee a further three applications for support through the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme (TCBRDS) have been approved. The total number of approvals now stands at 19, all but one have been implemented.
- The '10p After 3pm' parking trial has now been in operation since 2 January on Avon Road Car Park in Cannock and Forge Road Car Park in Rugeley.
- The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader concluded by noting the Committee's consideration of the complex issues associated with 'The Future of the District's Town Centres' at its most recent meeting. Accordingly, she recommended that it should be retained on Part 2 of the agenda throughout the next Municipal Year.

A Member sought clarification as to when the Public Realm improvements in Rugeley were due to complete as the Traders Association had been informed the works were two weeks behind schedule. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager confirmed that the works were due to complete during April/May. There had been no notification that there could be a delay with this timescale; however, he would seek clarification as the poor weather may well have led to a slippage in the programme.

A Member asked what type of new businesses had been assisted by the three recent approvals for support via the TCBRDS. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager advised that two were clothing retailers and he would advise the Member of the third.

Arising from the discussions on the TCBRDS Members indicated they would like to see a wider range of retailers within the town centres so as to improve the retail offer. It was confirmed that the Scheme was largely reactive, so the Council would have little control over the type of businesses that would apply for assistance. The aim was for supported businesses to establish themselves and be strong enough to continue trading after the funding support ends.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration confirmed that a list of retailers who had benefited from the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme would be forwarded to Members of the Committee. There was £20,000 remaining and negotiations were underway to secure additional funding. The Planning Control Committee had recently given consent for an out of town retail scheme and this was subject to the developer making a contribution to the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme. Once the money was a reality it would be possible to look at amending the terms of the Scheme to make it more responsive to the specific needs of the District's individual town centres.

RESOLVED:

The Head of Planning and Regeneration circulate a list of retailers who had benefited from the Town Centre Business Rates Discount Scheme to Members of the Committee.

### **38. Town Centre Traders Association Issues**

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the Minutes of the December meeting (attached to the agenda) outlined the Traders issues along with the Council's response.

The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager updated the Committee on the feedback received from the Traders Associations since the meeting in December, 2013. He advised that he had been unable to obtain an update from Rugeley Traders Association as Angi Cooney had been taken ill. With regard to Cannock, the issue of the street market had been raised and there was concern over the quality of the goods being sold. Additionally traders considered that there had not been enough consultation with the retailers in advance of the commencement of the street market trial. With regard to Hednesford Traders Association he commented that a new Chairman had been appointed and a good dialogue had commenced. The issues highlighted were as follows:

- how can S106 monies be utilised in order to assist Hednesford town centre;
- congestion/vehicle movements at the junction of Anglesey Street/Market Street (a meeting had taken place with Staffordshire County Council Highways and the Leader of the Council to discuss relocating the Taxi Rank)
- potential road safety issues at the junction of Victoria Street/Market Street (Councillor Ball raised this issue at Hednesford Forum and the County Council Highways would be investigating)
- Delivery lorries on Aldi car park blocking the entrance (this required further investigation)
- Suggestion that the pedestrian crossing should be replaced with a pelican (controlled) crossing (County Council Highways had been advised)

Reference was made to a rally that was taking place in Rugeley town centre this Saturday at 12 noon to support breast feeding. This had been arranged following a photograph that had appeared on a social media site labelling the mother as a "tramp" for breastfeeding in public.

A Member expressed the concern of the Rugeley Traders who were reporting between 20 - 40% losses in business due to the continuing road works. The traders would be seeking compensation for loss of business. He commented that it was possible that car parking income would be affected by the lack of trade in the town centre and this could have an effect on the Council's budget. He also made reference to the phasing of the lights under the Horsefair railway bridge which were not allowing the free flow of traffic. Additionally, he commented that

the road works at Horsefair looked as if they were behind schedule. He had reported these issues to Mark Keeling and Steve Knott, Staffordshire County Council Highways.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration suggested that a letter be sent, on behalf of the Committee, to Staffordshire County Council Highways expressing the Committee's concern with regards to the issues raised by the Member on behalf of the Rugeley Traders and ask for a response.

Further concern was raised regarding the condition of the flag stones and paving in Rugeley town centre and the increase in trips and falls as a result of this. A Member considered there were similar issues in Hednesford with regards to the condition of the flagstones, paving and missing grids. There was also concern regarding the lack of footfall in the town. Reference was made to Cannock town centre and the issue of missing trees which has resulted in empty circles in the paving.

The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader advised that these issues had been highlighted during a recent tour of the town centres and had been reported to County Council Highways.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration suggested that the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee may wish to contact the County Council to advise of the concern raised regarding the lack of Highway maintenance in the Districts town centres.

The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Leader advised that she had received positive feedback regarding the street market in Cannock which had helped make the town busy last Friday. It was considered that, if the offer of stalls was right, the Friday street market could help trade pick up in the town centre. She confirmed that the next street market in Rugeley was due to take place on 22 March and would have an emphasis on farmers produce.

RESOLVED:

- (A) That the feedback from the Traders Associations be noted.
- (B) That a letter be sent to Staffordshire County Council Highways expressing the Committee's concern with regards to the issues raised by the Rugeley Traders and ask for a response.
- (C) That the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee contact Staffordshire County Council to advise of the concern raised by Members regarding the lack of Highway maintenance in the Districts town centres.

### **39. Car Parking**

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised that the issues arising from the meeting held on 27 February in relation to car parking would be discussed in the confidential part of the agenda.

#### **40. Performance Reporting**

The Head of Planning and Regeneration led Members through the Quarter 2 performance information (Item 7.1 -7.2).

RESOLVED:

That the performance update be noted.

#### **41. Work Programme**

The Head of Planning and Regeneration sought the views of the Committee on the meetings held during the last Municipal Year. He asked whether Members were content with the format of the meetings and whether they wished to retain the issue of “the Future of the District’s town centres” on Part 2 of the agenda.

Members considered that the Part 2 discussion on “the Future of the District’s town centres” was a valuable agenda item and should continue for the next Municipal Year. It was also considered that the involvement of the Traders Association in the meetings was essential. It was suggested that it may be useful to speak with each of the Associations prior to their attendance at the Committee meetings so that their concerns could be raised in advance and hopefully addressed at the meeting.

Members discussed the vacant units within the town centres; particular reference was made to the four units in Market Street, Hednesford and asked whether there was any incentive that could be offered to assist in letting these units. The Planning and Economic Development Services Manager confirmed that agents would use incentives to encourage retailers to take up the empty units.

RESOLVED:

- (A) That the issues associated with the “the Future of the District’s town centres” be retained on Part 2 of the agenda throughout the next Municipal Year.
- (B) That the Committee continues to engage positively with the Traders Associations and representatives be invited to attend alternate meetings.
- (C) That the Traders Associations be asked to raise any issues in advance so that, where possible, these can be fully addressed at the meeting.

#### **42. 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**

**43. Discussion on Town Centre Issues**

The Head of Planning and Regeneration advised Members that a number of issues arose at the recent discussion on the Future of the District's Town Centres at the meeting held on 27 February, 2014. The Committee's views were being sought on these issues so that an agenda for the future could be established.

Issues around car parking were discussed at the meeting and information was circulated to the Committee which outlined the following:

- the comparative short stay car park charges as at January 2014
- car park ticket sales 2010-14
- St Joseph's car park – comparison of sales after the introduction of a minimum 2 hour stay
- Comparison of ticket sales after the introduction of the "10p rate after 3pm" parking trial at Avon Road, Cannock and Forge Road, Rugeley car parks (one month's information)

Members considered that car parking should be value for money and attractive to shoppers. If the retail offer within the town centres was improved parking would be a secondary concern.

A Member raised concern regarding litter in the hedge by Morrisons car park in Rugeley. The Town Centre Regeneration Portfolio Holder advised that it was important to report any litter issues to Environmental Health.

The Committee's views were sought on whether the current charging regime at St Joseph's car park (£1.10 for a 2 hour stay) should continue. There was a mixed view of this 12 month trial. Some Members noted that traders viewed car parking charges as an issue and therefore any reduction was seen as a positive thing. However, the effect of the 12 month trial did not show any particular benefit and some Members questioned whether introducing the reduced rate for a 2 hour stay at an alternative car park closer to the town centre would be more beneficial.

The Committee was content for the Chairman to advise Cabinet of the views of the Committee in this respect.

A Member suggested that parking should be provided free of charge on Rugeley

Charter Fair day.

With regard to the “10p after 3pm” parking trial which had been operating since January, 2014 Members considered that it was too early to ascertain whether the trial had been successful. The Committee was happy for further data to be gathered and this be discussed with the Chairman so that a view on the trial could be offered to Cabinet.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration then referred Members to the information that had been circulated to the Committee outlining a list of 10 questions/issues arising from the meeting on 27 February, 2014 arising from the discussion on the future of the District’s town centres. The views of Members of the Committee was being sought in order to form an agenda for the future.

The first question suggested that markets can add an extra dimension to the town centre offer and Members views were sought on this and also to whether any controls were required. Members considered that a market of a uniformed design would be an added attraction within a town centre. The market stalls should be of similar size and design, be located in the same position each week and offer the right type of goods. Standards should be enforced and once the offer was right it could be applied in all three of the District’s town centres. Concern was raised with regard to the differing size of some of the stalls in the Cannock street market. It was explained the reason for this was that some of the traders were operating with street trading permits and not under the street market legislation.

Another issue discussed at the meeting on 27 February related to the offer of leisure uses within the town centres. Members agreed that leisure uses within the District town centres was a good thing and the letting of units to family restaurants, for example, should be encouraged.

The Committee discussed whether there was any benefit in letting units to independent retailers. Members considered that the letting of units to independent retailers should be viewed as a positive change and welcomed within the town centres.

The Committee agreed that the introduction of free wi-fi within the town centres was essential in order to improve their offer.

In view of the time, the remainder of the questions/issues outlined on the handout would be deferred to a future meeting.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration also advised Members that the Council was contributing to a jointly commissioned piece of research which should help to guide future investment decisions in Cannock Town Centre and identify potential redevelopment sites. The need for this work was identified last year when the decision not to proceed with the Beecroft Road proposals was confirmed. Further information would be provided to the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED:

- (A) That the comments made by the Committee in response to the issues raised at the meeting held on 27 February, 2014 regarding “the future of the District’s town centres” as outlined above be noted and the remainder of the questions/issues outlined on the handout be deferred to a future meeting.
- (B) That the Chairman advise Cabinet of the views of the Committee in respect of the St Josephs car park (minimum 2 hour stay) trial.
- (C) That further data be gathered in respect of the “10p after 3pm” parking trial and this be discussed with the Chairman so that a view on the trial could be offered to Cabinet.

The meeting finished at 5.55 p.m.

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CHAIRMAN