

28 July, 2011

Town Centre Regeneration

Ward(s) St Matthews

Portfolios: Cllr Adrian Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Executive Summary:

The health of Walsall town centre and its economy have wide-ranging consequences for the economy of the rest of the borough, and as such it is recognised that the regeneration of the town centre is a key priority. The town centre has attracted almost £500million of investment over the last five years, and this report details the schemes which have successfully been delivered, as well as the opportunities which are now the focus for development. Although this level of investment in the town centre is promising, these developments need to be used as a catalyst for further investment and development. A number of development opportunities are identified within the town centre, but a strategic approach is required to bring these forward, and so a Town Centre Framework and Area Action Plan (AAP) are being developed, with the aim of bringing about comprehensive and sustainable social, economic and environmental improvements to the town centre.

Reason for scrutiny:

To bring Members up to date on completed, ongoing and future schemes for regenerating Walsall town centre.

Recommendations:

That the report be noted.

Background papers:

Ekosgen (2010) Walsall Sector Analysis Study (draft working paper)

Resource and legal considerations:

None as a result of this report.

Citizen impact:

A successful and prosperous town centre will create employment opportunities for residents and will improve the economy of the town centre and wider borough.

Environmental impact:

A vibrant and thriving town centre will create an attractive and well-used environment.

Performance management:

None.

Equality Implications:


None directly from this report.

Consultation:

None.

Contact Officer:

Simon Tranter – Head of Regeneration Development and Delivery

 . 01922 652543

tranter@walsall.gov.uk

1. Report

There has been a large amount of investment in the regeneration of Walsall town centre over recent years, and while some of this investment has slowed during the current economic situation, there are still a number of important planning consents and development opportunities which, if realised, will continue to contribute towards the regeneration of the town centre. The report explains the importance of the town centre, before setting out details of completed and potential developments within the town centre, and then looking briefly at the work of the Town Centre Framework.

2. Why focus on the town centre?

The economy of the town centre has important repercussions for the economy of the wider borough. It can be seen as the borough's 'shop-window' – it needs to be attractive to shoppers, visitors, businesses and investors, and to promote the borough as a place where people aspire to live. In their work on the LEA, Ekosgen stated that "the ability of the town centre to become an attractive location to accommodate growth will be extremely important in replacing jobs lost in other sectors. Walsall town centre has a crucial role to play and there is a need to update the vision and delivery plans" (Ekosgen, 2010).

3. Completed developments

There has been £500 million worth of investment in the town centre in the last 5 years, on a number of key development sites. These include:

Scheme	Description	Floorspace	Investment	timescales
ASDA development	Phase One of St Matthews Quarter saw construction of the largest town centre ASDA superstore in the UK, multi-storey car park, and apartments at Shannon's View.	Asda – around 7,000 sqm. 1,000 space car park 41 apartments	Total cost £25+ million	Completed in June 2007
New Tesco	Tesco superstore and offices constructed on the site formerly occupied by Walsall College.	10,699sqm superstore 2,959sqm of office space	£40 million	Tesco opened Dec. 2010. Offices completed but currently without an end user
Walsall College	New campus for Walsall College – the largest provider of qualifications for 14-19 year olds in Walsall, supporting over 3,000	24,600 sqm	Over £60 million	The campus opened in September 2009

	young people per year.			
New Manor Hospital	Improvements saw outdated buildings replaced with state-of-the-art facilities, benefiting patients and staff with the majority of clinical services located under one roof.	33,600 sqm new build over 4 levels 8,000 sqm refurbishment of existing buildings	£174 million, funded by PFI	Completed in 2010

4. The Big Three

There are three main development sites within the town centre, which are now the focus for attracting investment. These are currently at various stages of completion:

4.1 Waterfront:

- The Waterfront South scheme by Jessup Developments involved an investment of £50 million on a site adjacent to the town centre canal basin. This is a residential development of around 350 dwellings, which are a mix of apartments and houses. Phase One of this scheme is completed, with Phase Two due for completion in June 2012.
- A Premier Inn hotel is starting on site at Waterfront North in September 2011. This will be a 100-bed hotel with ground floor restaurant, covering 879 sq m. The hotel involves a £10 million investment, and is due for completion in autumn 2012.
- The remainder of the Waterfront North site currently holds outline consent for up to 6 further buildings, totalling over 60,000 sq m of development, for commercial, office and residential uses. Wharfingers cottage is a 147 sq m unit with detailed consent for retail, leisure and office uses. It is anticipated that Phase One proposals would attract an investment of around £65 million.
- Waterfront Lex to the west provides an opportunity to expand Waterfront North and South. The site does not currently hold planning consent, but acceptable uses include leisure and entertainment, office/ business, residential, hotel, bars and restaurants, and cultural uses.

4.2 St Matthew's Quarter

- This is a large area in a key retail location within the town centre. Recently Primark and The Co-operative supermarket have been attracted to the town centre, and are due to move into a brand new development based at the Old Square Shopping Centre. It will consist of a two storey 4,058sqm retail development, a four storey 2,178sqm building with a shop unit at first floor and commercial on upper floors, and a one storey 276sqm shop unit within the Old Square. The development involves an investment of £13 million, and the stores will be open for Christmas 2013.
- The Shannon's Mill site also forms a key opportunity within St Matthew's Quarter. Following the fire on this site in 2007, plans for this area have had to be revised, and as a vacant site this area now provides a key opportunity for a major comparison retail development. The Mill site covers approximately 8,000 sqm, while the wider area including shops is around 16,000 sqm.

4.3 The Gigaport

- This major scheme covers an overall area of 25 hectares to the north of the town centre. In 2007 outline consent was granted for office space, data centre, hotel, live-work space, health and sports facility, retail, and restaurant use.
- Walsall Housing Group (whg) is relocating to a new, high quality office building which has been constructed within the Gigaport scheme. The building has a floorspace of 4,018sqm and cost £7 million to build. It is due for completion by autumn 2011.

5. **Tier 2 Developments**

There are a number of sites within the town centre which constitute important opportunities for development, some of which are due to begin on site imminently while others hold planning consent but are yet to begin construction:

- 5.1 Improvements to the Bradford Place interchange will include the installation of new state-of-the-art bus shelters, upgrading pedestrian crossing, and carriageway resurfacing. Work starts on 24th July 2011 and is due for completion in September 2011, at a cost of £430,000.
- 5.2 A 'Wayfinding' scheme is currently in development, which aims to connect the key buildings and areas within the town centre and assist visitors in finding their way around the centre. This £116,000 scheme is being funded by developer contributions, including Tesco, and is due for completion in early 2012.
- 5.3 The overstrand in Digbeth has been granted permission for demolition, which is due to take place between July and September 2011. The removal of this out-dated structure will open up important views to and from St Matthew's church.
- 5.4 There has recently been significant level of investment in the night-time economy offer in the town centre. This includes the recent renovation of St Matthew's Hall following its purchase by JD Wetherspoon, as well as the refurbishment of The Imperial pub on Darwall Street. Furthermore, the former Insomnia nightclub in Bradford Place has now been refurbished and re-opened as Vogue nightclub.
- 5.5 In Station Street, the Grade II listed Boak building has detailed planning consent for conversion into 31 apartments. Other parts of the street hold outline planning permission for a mixed use development comprising of up to 210 residential apartments and a minimum of 1,115 sq m of commercial space.
- 5.6 The media has recently reported on a potential development on Stafford Street. The proposal is for a 10-storey mixed use development, creating up to 200 jobs and attracting an investment of around £10 million.
- 5.7 An opportunity exists for investment at the Jerome Retail Park. The area covers approximately 26,750 sq m, and is currently occupied by 5 large retail buildings. The area has been considered as a possible transport interchange due to its proximity to the current Bradford Place bus station.

6. **The Town Centre Framework**

However, although this level of investment and the completion of such projects is very promising for the town centre, alone it is still not enough to ensure the transformation of the centre to the extent that is required. These developments need to be used as a catalyst for further investment. A number of development opportunities have been identified within the town centre but a strategic approach is required to bring these

forward. Therefore a Town Centre Framework is being developed, with the aim of bringing about comprehensive and sustainable social, economic and environmental improvements to the town centre.

The Town Centre Framework will produce four key outputs, which follow the four levels identified through Working Smarter:

- i. A marketing tool to promote investment and the retention of businesses in the town centre, as well as improving the public image, raising the profile of the town centre and tackling negative perceptions;
- ii. Town Centre operations, focusing on day-to-day management issues;
- iii. Delivery of projects and timescales/ phasing – investment and improvements;
- iv. The Area Action Plan – a long term plan to allocate sites for development for new shops, leisure and offices for the Town Centre.

7. Town Centre Operating Model

There is a need to protect, maintain and promote the town centre on a day to day basis. Regeneration is currently reviewing structures in order to combine town centre functional activities within its directorate in order to provide a blanket approach to lift current delivery limitations, increase capacity and reduce costs. The new role of the support team will work closely with team leads and adopt a consultative role to inform other key work streams including the emerging Town Centre Framework. The role will include providing sound practical advice including highlighting the vulnerability of services where new developments in the town centre emerge in order to protect, maintain and strengthen the business community.