

BRIEFING NOTE

AGENDA ITEM NO.11

TO: REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL
DATE: 4th September 2014

RE: WALSALL MARKET FEASIBILITY STUDY

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel on progress made to date on the Walsall Market Feasibility Study since the Panel's last update on 22nd April 2014.

The Feasibility Study, as led by the Walsall Markets Working Group, has now reached a point where the comments from the extensive public, trader and stakeholder consultation in March 2014 have been incorporated into the design of the new market in so far as has been possible, and work on the preparation of material to support the planning application for the new permanent market is nearing completion, prior to submission. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to explain recent progress and to seek agreement as to the project's next steps.

Background

The Markets Working Group was established in 2012 to consider the future of Walsall Market. GVA/The Retail Group were appointed thereafter and worked with the Markets Working Group on future options for Walsall Market, in terms of both location and design. The Working Group made recommendations to Cabinet through the Scrutiny Panel which Cabinet endorsed, agreeing to the commissioning of a more detailed Feasibility Study. In Autumn 2013, a tendering process was conducted, resulting in Arup being appointed for this more detailed piece of work in October 2013.

Progress since last update (22/04/14)

At its meeting on 22nd April 2014, Scrutiny Panel resolved to:

- note the contents of this update report, specifically the preferred location (The Bridge) and design concepts for Walsall Market;
- recommend to Cabinet the direction of travel for the project and seek agreement for the design concepts to be developed further for the permanent Walsall Market;
- receive further reports in line with the next steps for the project and continued design development for Walsall Market.

Further Development of the Design for Walsall Market

Following the last meeting of the Scrutiny Panel and recommendation to Cabinet thereafter, the feasibility study's timeline was extended beyond the original April 2014 date to enable the preferred design for the permanent Walsall Market to be developed further so as to incorporate the feedback received from the public, trader and stakeholder consultation events held in March 2014.

The comprehensive consultation process has been important to inform the progression of the design, and the Working Group has previously been encouraged by stakeholder's willingness to engage and provide feedback. A further opportunity for stakeholder consultation will be available through the future planning application. In addition, the consultation feedback provided has also enabled Arup and the Development & Delivery Service, who oversees the management of the Markets Service, to consider the capital and revenue implications of the proposals to ensure the project can be delivered within the current capital budget of £2 million and to minimise the operational costs of the changes.

At its meeting of the 31 March 2014, the Working Group was provided with feedback information from this second stage of consultation. Those design issues have now been incorporated into the final design, in so far as has been possible. For example:

- The renegotiation of the area of the market Exclusion Zone with Zurich / Threadneedle, allowing for a larger area of The Bridge to be utilised as part of the permanent Walsall Market, is close to completion;
- Catering and food vehicles have now been incorporated into the design to support the food offer;
- Zoning of the market is being considered, with a clear food zone for fresh and consumable produce alongside appropriate power, drainage and waste collection arrangements;
- The prominence of public art has been maintained, ensuring good legibility in key locations;
- Loading/unloading and access arrangements for the permanent market have been tested further; an appropriate vehicle tracking exercise has been undertaken as part of the design process;
- The layout of stalls continues to be considered; the attractiveness of all stall positions has been considered;
- Council officers have made visits to other markets to seek reassurance as to the robustness and suitability of demountable stalls in general; suppliers of similar products have been engaged with so as to understand the maintainability and longevity of such structures. This is an ongoing process that will continue to the point of planning application submission;
- The red line boundary of the planning application will be amended to focus upon the market area;
- A Highway Maintainability Audit is being undertaken for the proposed design, working to ensure the suitability of proposed materials. In addition, existing materials within the area that are able to be cleansed and reused as part of the new scheme will be, so far as possible.

Over and above the design elements discussed above, detailed consideration has been given to the viable operation of the future permanent market, for example:

- The Council is now in the process of developing revised and new management plans and arrangements for the operation of the existing and future market. The development of these plans/arrangements alongside a Market Design and Management Plan (a summary of which will be submitted as part of the planning application) will help to ensure the permanent market is successful;
- The Council is working to secure a clear understanding of the operational requirements of the proposals through Arup's work and is confident that the new Walsall Market presents no further revenue or capital implications than those which are currently addressed within the budget.

- Consideration continues to be given to the provision of trader storage facilities alongside the permanent market. A planning permission has now been granted for the demolition of 57,57a, 57b and 58 Lower Hall Lane, to facilitate temporary market storage on the site for 2 years. The current intention is to utilise this period of time to consider all options for permanent market trader storage.

Next Steps

Role of Markets Working Group

To ensure the success of the new Walsall Market, it is important for Markets Working Group to continue to be engaged and involved in the emerging workstreams. It is requested that Scrutiny and Performance Panel agree for the Markets Working Group to be re-established and work with Council Officers and Arup to finalise any outstanding details on the market design and layout that are required to reach the point of the submission of the planning application, including the incorporation in so far as possible of any final comments from key stakeholders and market traders.

One further request of the Markets Working Group will be to shape and inform the emerging Design & Management Plan for the market, ensuring that it is fit for purpose and satisfies the aims for both the existing and new Market.

The intention is to report to Cabinet in October 2014, further to Cabinet's approval in April 2014, to support the undertaking of more detailed design work to reach a conclusion on the Walsall Market Feasibility Study, and to take forward the findings of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel in regard to the permanent location and design of Walsall Market. There is now greater clarity on the final design of the permanent market based on feedback from public, trader and stakeholder consultations, noting also that there are currently no known additional capital/revenue implications for existing budgets arising from the present proposals.

Trader Engagement

A commitment has been made to hold a further Trader's Information Event on Tuesday 16th September 2014, to engage them in the final preferred design and explain the proposed timeline for the submission of the planning application and implementation thereafter. Our existing retailer/business networks will also be used to keep other stakeholders up to date on progress.

Proposed Timeline for Planning Submission

We are working to the following timeline for the submission of the planning application for the permanent Walsall Market:

4th Sept	Scrutiny Panel & forming of Markets Working Group
w/c 8th Sept	Markets Working Group

16th Sept	Traders Information Event
Late Sept/ early Oct	Markets Working Group
22nd Oct	Cabinet
Early November	Submission of planning application
Early Feb 2015	Planning decision, dependent on Planning Committee dates

Temporary Move

A temporary move of some existing market stalls will be required in the near future, in order to facilitate the necessary works as part of the Network Rail railway electrification project in Park Street, and also to reflect the recently renegotiated Market Exclusion Zone, that will exist on completion of the Old Square Phase 1 Primark unit. Approximately 12 stalls will need to be relocated by mid-February 2015 and, as with the previous temporary move, we intend to work closely with the Market Traders Association and affected traders to communicate the key information once the details of the requirement is clearer.

It is recognised that Walsall town centre is currently going through a much welcomed programme of development and change, with projects such as the redevelopment of Old Square Phase 1 now underway and the planned Norton and Proffitt development. It is acknowledged that this change can bring disruption. The Council will wish to ensure that it minimises the impact on existing businesses during this transitional period and so the implementation of the permanent market will be carefully planned to take account of any other development activity occurring simultaneously in the town centre. How this activity will impact can only be known as this project and others progress; should provisions need to be made to adjust and flex the timescales around different projects to support the town centre then this will be done in consultation with the Scrutiny Panel, the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, and key stakeholders/ statutory consultees.

Arup are developing an implementation programme so that the Council and its stakeholders can understand how the market and town centre might continue to operate under a 'business as usual' premise whilst the future changes to improve the permanent market take place. Officers will share this with the Markets Working Group prior to the submission of the planning application.

Subject to planning permission being granted, the next step would be to appoint consultants to take the project through to the implementation stage, including the technical drawings that would be required. The appointment of consultants would be necessary due to the lack of skill-sets and capacity within the Council to undertake this work.

Recommendations

That Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel agrees to:

- a) the forming of a new Markets Working Group to:

- agree that decisions on the finalised design, further to the planned engagement with traders in September, are delegated to the Markets Working Group, to meet ahead of October 22nd meeting of Cabinet and prior to the submission of a planning application;
- endorse the approach to completing the final design based on feedback from previous public, trader and stakeholder consultations, noting that there are currently no known additional capital/revenue implications for existing budgets arising from the present proposals;

b) receive future reports setting out progress and more defined timelines, following the planning process.

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