

REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Wednesday 3 December 2008 at 6.00 p.m.

Panel Members present

Councillor D. Pitt (Chair)
Councillor S. Coughlan (Vice-Chair)
Councillor B. Tweddle
Councillor I. Shires
Councillor A. Underhill

Portfolio holders present

Councillor A. Andrew – Regeneration
Councillor A. Harris - Transport

Officers present

Mike Tichford – Assistant Director – Regeneration
Stuart Wootton – Finance Manager – Regeneration and
Neighbourhoods
Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer

Other invitees present

Karen Sands – Chair, Walsall Market Traders Association
Tony Larnar – Vice-Chair, Walsall Market Traders Association
Mike Riley – National Market Traders Federation

45/08 APOLOGIES

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors T. Ansell, D. Anson, B. Douglas-Maul and K. Sears.

46/08 SUBSTITUTIONS

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

47/08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest of the party whip.

48/08 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2008, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

(annexed)

49/08 **FORWARD PLAN**

98/08 St Matthews Quarter

The Chair reported to the Panel that he written a joint letter with Councillor Andrew to Threadneedle, owners of the Old Square Shopping Centre, to discuss their threats of legal action if the Council relocated the market. A meeting was now scheduled to take place on 18 December 2008.

A copy of the letter sent to Threadneedle was tabled at the meeting.

(annexed)

95/08 A34 South Park and Ride

In response to a question Councillor Harris reported that this item had not progressed and agreed to report more fully on the status of the item to all Members outside of the meeting.

54/08 Housing Strategy 2008-11

Following a query from a Member of the Panel Craig Goodall explained that the Strategy had been considered by the Health, Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

Members commented that housing developers were not delivering the boroughs affordable housing targets. A Member suggested that the implications of the Strategy should be considered by the Affordable Housing Working Group.

The Panel considered the effect of the economic downturn on the borough and the impact it could have on developments, worklessness and section 106 agreements.

Mike Tichford reported that timescales for the development of plans at Moxley and Goscote were being adjusted and that further work was required to deliver further affordable housing on these sites. In addition to this he reported that developers are seeking to renegotiate section 106 agreements due to the downturn in the housing market, which has reduced or eliminated profit margins. The Panel requested a report on this issue and the impact it was having on project delivery.

Following a question from the Panel Mike Tichford commented that no feedback was available at the current time regarding the Panel's recommendations regarding the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Resolved

That:

- 1. Councillor Harris provide an update report to all Members on progress to date with decision 95/08 'A34 South Park and Ride';**
- 2. the Affordable Housing Working Group consider the implications of decision 54/08 'Housing Strategy 2008-11' as part of their future work programme;**

3. the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel a report be added to the work programme on section 106 payments to Walsall Council and the potential impact any reductions in anticipated income could have on planned projects;

and;

4. the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel be provided with feedback on the outcome of its recommendation on the Regional Spatial Strategy made at its meeting on 6 November 2008.

50/08 DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS 2009/10

Members considered making proposals to Cabinet for inclusion in the Walsall Council budget for 2009/10.

Stuart Wootton explained that following receipt of the resource planning document for the Regeneration Directorate on 2 October 2008 the Panel now had the opportunity to make recommendations to Cabinet on 17 December 2008 before it agreed its draft budget for 2009/10.

The Panel discussed recommendations concerning recruitment, communication material and the role of scrutiny in the budget setting process.

Resolved

That:

1. the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance support the Council wide recruitment suspension to all posts except for those which are vitally important;
2. all Council communication material such as: Walsall Pride, Team Spirit and A-Z Services, should be maintained to ensure as much information as possible is available to local people to access services;
3. realistic and achievable budgets for service areas are set;
4. a full decision conferencing style event is held for the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel with Regeneration and Finance Officers to enable a full and detailed discussion of the budget for 2010/11;

and;

5. Councillor Des Pitt to present the Panels recommendations to the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 12 December 2008.

51/08 ST MATTHEWS QUARTER WORKING GROUP

The Panel considered a report from the St Matthews Quarter Working Group (STMQWG) on terms of reference for the working group and future management options for Walsall Market.

The Chair reminded Members that this report had been deferred from the last meeting of the Panel following the decision not to temporarily relocate Walsall Market to The Bridge.

It was explained to the Panel that the STMQWG had identified two potential future management options for Walsall Market. The first being that the management should remain with the Council and the alternative being that the management be operated by a joint venture company between Norton & Proffit and the Council with both companies holding a 50/50 share plus robust heads of terms and a support package for the boroughs district markets.

A number of Members informed the meeting that they would only support a recommendation for the Council to maintain the management of the market. They were uncertain of the joint venture proposal, no matter what heads of terms were proposed, and cited the example of the Lock Museum as an area where a similar idea had been unsuccessful. It was felt that if Councils elsewhere could operate markets successfully then so could Walsall. It was also important that the needs of the boroughs district markets were considered.

Karen Sands commented that she had visited each market in the borough and estimated that Bloxwich, Darlaston and Willenhall Markets were losing around £70,000 a year. This shortfall was balanced by the substantial income that was secured by Walsall Market. So if the market was managed by a joint venture company the Council would be losing 50% of the markets service main income at a time when it was anticipated that income levels would substantially increase. She added that three market stalls had established a petition to lobby for the market to move to The Bridge that had secured 1,400 signatures in two days.

Mike Riley, National Market Traders Federation, reported that his organisation was in favour of retaining Council managed markets and commented that privately operated markets can be poorly managed and often have to be taken over by local councils to rectify the situation. The one supportable alternative option was for the Council to allow the market traders to manage the market themselves.

In response to a question it was clarified that the Council would retain the administration of the market charter.

Members were surprised by concerns expressed by the Old Square Shopping Centre and Saddlers Centre. Karen Sands reported that the Saddlers Centre no longer had any concerns following a recent meeting and that the Old Square had a footfall of 94,000 on Thursdays and Sundays which were non-market days.

It was proposed and seconded that the Council should retain the management of Walsall Market. This resolution was passed unanimously.

Craig Goodall highlighted the working groups terms of reference and membership to the Panel.

Resolved

That:

- 1. the Council retain the future management of Walsall Market;**
- 2. the terms of reference for the St Matthews Quarter Working Group be approved;**
- and;**
- 3. Councillor Angela Underhill be appointed to the St Matthews Quarter Working Group.**

52/08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was noted as 8 January 2009.

The meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.

Chair:

Date: