

## **REGENERATION SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**

Tuesday, 27 November, 2012 at 6.00 p.m. at the Council House

**Panel Members Present:** Councillor L. Harrison (Chair)  
Councillor I. Azam (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor D. Barker  
Councillor C. Creaney  
Councillor M. Longhi  
Councillor B. Thomas

**Officers Present:** Tim Johnson – Executive Director, Regeneration  
Mike Tichford - Assistant Director, Regeneration  
Paul Nicholson – Regeneration Manager: Development  
Helen Kindon – Team Leader, Walsall Town & District Centres  
Management  
Deb Slade - Creative Development Team Manager  
Daniel Carins - Regeneration Officer  
Chris Knowles – Lead Accountant, Children’s & Regeneration  
Finance  
Paul Frater – The Retail Group  
Mike Evans – The Retail Group  
Gill Griggs – GVA  
Matthew Underhill – Committee Governance & Business  
Manager

**Portfolio Holders Present:** Councillor A. Andrew – Regeneration

Councillor C. Towe – Finance & Personnel

### **206/12 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S. Wade.

### **207/12 SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting

### **208/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

### **209/12 MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October, 2012, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

## 210/12 MARKETS WORKING GROUP

The Regeneration Manager: Development introduced a presentation by representatives of GVA and The Retail Group (TRG). The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- The Regeneration Manager: Development explained that there had been two work streams for the Markets Working Group. The first had considered the future of the district centre markets, Bloxwich and Willenhall, and how they could be supported and enhanced. The second had considered options for the long term location of Walsall market, given the impact on the market of two key retail developments within the town centre. It was explained that TRG and GVA had been commissioned to advise on the potential options and to recommend a preferred option for the market, with the focus on delivering an enhanced market offer within the town centre. Panel Members who had participated in the Working Group had broadly supported the proposals made by TRG and GVA;
- It was explained that TRG was one of the leading retail consultancies in the UK, specialising in markets, while GVA was the UK's leading multi-disciplinary property consultancy;
- TRG set out some of the key findings from their investigation. This included that Walsall market was a popular part of the town's retail offer. However, a lack of investment was showing, while the existing layout did not assist market traders and was sprawling. The research had also highlighted that the catering stalls were mass market and many of the stalls at the front of the market were not the most impressive. It was also apparent that the market had become out of touch with shopping habits and was starting to be left behind. It was the view of TRG that the existing market was only surviving because of its proximity to key footfall routes. To underline the existing issues, a consultation exercise had revealed that 65% of traders who responded had experienced a fall in turnover year on year in spite of rents being quite low;
- The representatives from TRG and GVA explained that the primary objective of their work was to identify the most effective type of market for Walsall. It had been recognised by the National Market Traders Federation (NMTF) that markets need to be dynamic and change to reflect shoppers expectations. It was clear that Walsall market had a poor image. While it was very popular and an asset for the town it was going in the wrong direction;
- It was the view of the representatives from TRG and GVA that the market needed to appeal to more categories of shopper. The research had shown that many town centre shoppers only visit the market once a week. It would be important for the market to seek to attract other groups, including families and office workers This would enable the market to act as an anchor and support the rest of the town centre retail offer;
- It was the view of the representatives from TRG and GVA that the existing market layout was not helpful to shoppers. It would be important for the stronger stalls to be at the entrance to the market and this would enable a strong impression to be created. In addition, it would be important to establish an identity for the market that is distinct from the retail offer in the town centre. In this respect it would be vital for the location of the market to have the capacity to support its long term development. The current market lacked

critical mass (the effective grouping of market stalls in one concentrated area);

- The representatives from TRG and GVA also highlighted the importance of the market making a strong statement in the eye of the consumer. They explained that from their work with the NMTF the most effective way for market traders to boost sales is witnessing what successful neighbouring stall holders are doing. However, this would not be possible under the current configuration of the market;
- In terms of locations it was explained that the Victorian Arcade had strong footfall. However, it was not big enough to house the market, while the Old Square Shopping Centre offered the right sized accommodation but would require the payment of significant retail rent. The consultants had concluded that a reconfiguration of The Bridge offered the most viable solution. The consultants had also concluded that the Walsall offer would have to be a street market in a strong location and The Bridge offered a prime retail area. However, this would require the relocation of the fountain. The new layout would cluster stalls at The Bridge and create a linear route to the bus station, along Bradford Street. It would also be important for clear sight lines to be established by ensuring that the market was not confused with street traders in Park Street;
- An alternative layout option was a circular route, which would include demountable stalls on Digbeth and Lower Hall Lane. This option would avoid the prime frontage of new development schemes;
- The representatives from TRG and GVA explained that the proposed market on the Bridge would include a permanent canopy which would provide a visual focus. It could also be used to hold local events. It would also be important to invest in new and attractive market stalls. It would also be important to develop the food and catering offer to between 25 %- 35% of the total number of stalls;
- The representatives from TRG and GVA explained that it was anticipated that the costs of relocation and establishment of the market on the Bridge would be around £1m. It was anticipated that this would deliver revenue of between £300 - £500k per annum, on the assumption that the market traded for six days a week. It was explained that an alternative option of an indoor market had been considered. However, it had been estimated that the cost of developing this facility would be between £8m and £18m, including construction and fit-out;
- A Panel Member highlighted the importance of ensuring that a visit to the market was a family experience. He spoke of a recent visit to a market in Wales which had proven enjoyable for all members of his family;
- The Executive Director explained that he had recently met with one of the developers involved in the planned retail developments in the town centre. He explained that the developers would strongly oppose the circular configuration option due to concerns regarding the blocking of retail shop frontages by market stalls. The representatives from TRG and GVA requested the opportunity to meet with the developers. They expressed the view that such a meeting would enable them to allay the concerns of the developers;
- The Portfolio Holder explained that many local businesses would be pleased if the fountain was removed from The Bridge. Its removal would enable that area of the town centre to become more economically active. The Portfolio Holder emphasised the need for a market to be established in Walsall of which the town could be proud and which was integral to the future. A Panel

Member agreed and highlighted the importance of a focal point being created. The Chair of the Walsall Market Traders Association supported the proposal for the market to be moved to The Bridge. He explained that holding events would attract people to the market in a similar way to Covent Garden. The relocation of the market to the Bridge, together with the removal of the fountain to a new location was supported by Panel Members;

- The Team Leader, Walsall Town & District Centres Management explained that the other activity of the working group had focused on seeking to understand the type of support required by the district centre markets in Bloxwich and Willenhall. It was explained that while Bloxwich market was performing at a reasonable level, Willenhall market was struggling to attract traders. A series of questionnaires had been developed and market traders and local people consulted. This included anonymous telephone interviews undertaken by a third party. There was a common theme to the feedback. This included that most people spent between £6 and £10 and around thirty minutes shopping at the market. Most people found the markets good value, with fruit and vegetables, clothing, meat and fish amongst the most popular purchases. However, a key finding was that while the catchment area for the markets was very small, further work was required to further encourage local shoppers to use the markets;
- A working group Member explained that many local people were not prepared to visit local markets due to fear of crime. He emphasised the need for a stronger police presence. He also expressed concern regarding CCTV surveillance recently appearing to be less successful at capturing incidents of crime. A further issue identified by the working group centred on the need to provide toilet access to stall holders on trading days from the early hours onwards. The need to improve market stalls and collection of litter at Willenhall market was also identified. While the need to develop a clear business plan for the district markets was also noted;
- Following a Member query it was explained that a higher average spend by shoppers at Birmingham's markets was likely to be a consequence of the type of goods being purchased, including clothing;
- A Member highlighted concerns he had previously expressed regarding highways signage at Willenhall market. The Team Leader, Walsall Town & District Centres Management explained that the Highways team were responsible for changing the traffic regulation order. However, she would investigate and include the Portfolio Holder and Panel Member in correspondence with Highways;

## **RESOLVED:**

**That:**

**The Panel recommends that:**

- (1) the Cabinet support the conclusions of the Panel and Markets Working Group that the future location of Walsall market be consolidated on The Bridge and Bradford Street;**
- (2) the Cabinet request officers to commission a feasibility and design study to assess the design and financial implications of creating a new market square on The Bridge, including the possible relocation of the fountain;**

- (3) the Cabinet receive a future report outlining the process and timeline for delivery of the project;**
- (4) that all stakeholders, including Walsall Market Traders Association are consulted regarding the proposals;**
- (5) that the Markets Working Group continue to consider ongoing activity in relation to proposals for the town centre market;**
- (6) that the Markets Working Group continue to consider activity in relation to enhancing and sustaining the district markets in Bloxwich and Willenhall, and overseeing the preparation of implementation plans for those markets; and**
- (7) that the report be noted;**

#### **211/12 QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION**

The Lead Accountant, Children's & Regeneration Finance introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- It was explained that the forecast year-end financial position for service within the portfolio was an underspend of £269k. It was explained that a capital underspend of £1.941m was also forecast for the year end. The Executive Director explained that where necessary capital spending would be rolled forward to the next year.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

#### **212/12 DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2013/14 FOR REGENERATION PORTFOLIO**

The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration introduced the report.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted**

#### **213/12 GROWING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN WALSALL**

The Creative Development Team Manager and Regeneration Officer introduced the report. The following is a summary of the report and subsequent discussion:

- A piece of work had been undertaken to understand how to develop the opportunity for creative industries in Walsall. The Panel were asked to consider a series of options for further activity:
- Option 1: This would include the development of a range of events of differing sizes. This could be support for community, council and private festivals and

events. This option would also include further support for the Walsall Night Market. Officers explained that a group of ten local artists and creative groups had been brought together and supported to participate in the market. It was explained that these groups would not have attended the market individually. The focus on the town centre would continue with the bid to hold the Turner Prize at the New Art Gallery offering the potential for significant investment and development of creative industries in Walsall. In addition pop-up activity, promoting art and artistic activities in empty shop units, would also be supported;

- Option 2: It was explained that this would focus on voluntary and business sector arts development. This would include supporting creative enterprises and entrepreneurs;
- Option 3: This would be aimed at developing strong networks of creative businesses within Walsall. This would better facilitate collaborative working to enable sharing of expertise and to undertake joint bids for work. This would include networking events and the possible creation of facilities to provide incubation premises and other support;
- Panel Members expressed strong support for each of the different options, with one-off events and developing support for creative enterprises noted as good ideas;
- The Portfolio Holder explained that local artists and creative enterprises were reluctant to work with the council. It was his understanding that the local art community felt excluded during the procurement process. He explained that he had undertaken work with an officer to develop better links with local artists and make use of their skills.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the work in developing creative industries continue and reflect all of the areas within the three options discussed. This should include the presentation of a business case to the Panel as soon as available; and**
- (2) the report be noted.**

#### **214/12 WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13 AND FORWARD PLAN**

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the Forward Plan and Work Programme be noted.**

#### **215/12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting was 6.00 p.m. on 17 January, 2012.

*The meeting closed at 7:27p.m.*

Signed:

Date: