

27 November 2012

Walsall Market Relocation

Ward: St Matthews

Portfolio: Cllr A Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to summarise the report of the consultancy team GVA / The Retail Group commissioned by the Markets Working Group to examine the options for the relocation of Walsall market, and to invite the Panel to make appropriate recommendations on a preferred way forward. This report also provides a context to accompany a presentation from the consultancy team to this meeting that explains the outcomes of their work.

The Panel received a report to its meeting on 16 October 2012 explaining the progress of the Working Group in leading two key workstreams concentrating on the relocation of Walsall market, and reviewing the current position with Walsall markets and identifying ways in which the markets can play a greater role in the attractiveness and prosperity of Walsall town centre and district centres of Bloxwich and Willenhall.

The Working Group received and supported a presentation from the consultancy team at its meeting on 8 November which set out their analysis of the current market and its trading characteristics, the outcome of consultation with stakeholders, an appraisal of options for the future location of the market and a preferred way forward.

Their objectives in fulfilling the brief were to:

- Define the optimum market for Walsall
- Develop a screening filter to assess the suitability of the suggested (and other) sites
- Identify the optimum permanent site for Walsall Market that retains / increases the financial health of the market and creates the environment to improve the quality of trade
- Develop a financial plan for the preferred option (including cost benefit analysis), as well as the base data underpinning its reason for selection
- Undertake a feasibility assessment of creating a permanent market on the recommended location, as well as produce initial concept designs as to how the market could look

The methodology used in achieving these objectives involved bespoke research of

a number of key areas involving consultation with traders, retailers, property stakeholders and leading national markets organisations, a retail review, an appraisal of possible town centre locations, a review of best practice in markets, and a wider policy review.

The retail review considered an overview of the current location and environment of the market, its marketing and branding, and relationship with the remainder of the town centre both now and how redevelopment in the future will re-shape the centre.

The outcome of the face-to-face customer surveys with market traders, major retailers, key stakeholders intending to invest in the town centre such as Threadneedle and Norton and Proffitt, and leading markets organisations such as the National Market Traders Federation is summarised in the attached document.

Based on these findings a comprehensive review of alternative locations, both indoor and outdoor, for the market within the town centre was carried out; these locations included the Saddlers Centre, Old Square, High Street towards St Matthews church, Victorian Arcade, Jerome retail park, and the possible future link between George Street and Lower hall Lane.

The conclusions include an appraisal of the existing market, a description of customer and stakeholder expectations for a successful market, the characteristics of what that successful market should include, the criteria used to select the optimum location for the market, and an indicative financial appraisal.

The consultancy team will present their recommended course of action in terms of the location and layout of the market based on it remaining as a traditional outdoor street feature, and including draft designs for the market stalls themselves.. The implications of the proposals include issues of capacity and design which could impact on the number of stalls being accommodated and the need for capital works to maximise the available space and monies to provide high-quality, more attractive stalls and improved signage.

In addition, the consultancy team have also examined a number of ways and made recommendations on improvements to the quality of the market that will enable it to be better placed to play its crucial role in increasing the attractiveness and variety of the town centre offer.

It is envisaged that the scrutiny panel will wish to make recommendations to cabinet on the relocation of Walsall market.

Reason for scrutiny:

The Panel has established a Working Group to consider matters relating to Walsall markets. In particular, the Working Group, at its meeting on 21st August, agreed terms of reference which included an assessment of the options for delivering the relocation of Walsall market; the need to relocate the market is being driven by the requirements to deliver major redevelopment in the Digbeth area and the opportunity to secure real improvements to the quality of the market offer.

It was anticipated that the Working Group would report its outcomes to the Panel at its meeting on 27th November with recommendations presented to Cabinet in early 2013.

Recommendations:

- 1. That the Panel receive the presentation by GVA / The Retail Group of a report appraising the options for the relocation of Walsall market;**
- 2. That the Panel note the key outcomes and conclusions of the report in terms of the future location and layout of Walsall market;**
- 3. That the Panel make appropriate recommendations on the future location of Walsall market for consideration by cabinet.**

Background papers:

Reports to Scrutiny Panel on 16th October and Markets Working Group on 8th November.

Report of GVA / The Retail Group – Walsall Market Relocation Options Appraisal; Key Findings and Conclusions.

Resource and legal considerations:

The costs of appointing external consultants to consider the options for relocating Walsall market can be met from existing budgets.

The proposal for the location of the market and delivery of resulting improvements could create significant financial impacts.

Citizen impact:

Walsall's street markets have a long tradition and play an important role in the offer provided to shoppers, visitors and businesses alike in the town and district centres. The consultation surveys have involved all stakeholders in order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the markets.

Environmental impact:

Improvements to the market, and the proposed relocation of Walsall market in particular, will aim to result in a positive environmental impact.

Performance management:

The scrutiny exercise will endeavour to result in conclusions on the demand for and future viability of the markets which will inform the management of the Council's performance in respect of the markets service.

Equality Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment will need to be carried out in respect of the options for the relocation of Walsall market.

Consultation:

Consultation with a wide variety of customers and stakeholders – including traders, businesses and citizens - is key to the workstreams of the Working Group and will inform the proposed outcomes.

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