

BRIEFING NOTE

Agenda Item no.9

TO: REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL
DATE: 6th March 2014

RE: WALSALL MARKET FEASIBILITY STUDY

Purpose

The purpose of this briefing note is to update the Panel on progress made to date on the Walsall Market Feasibility Study, as led by the Walsall Markets Working Group.

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 thorough tendering process was conducted, resulting in Arup being appointed for this more detailed piece of work in October 2013.

Progress since last update (23/01/14)

The initial desktop research has been concluded by Arup, reviewing the previous GVA/The Retail Group study in light of current considerations, including the proposed timescales for the Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) and the Old Square Phase 1 Exclusion Zone.

Due to the emergence of these considerations in the time since the completion of the GVA/The Retail Group work, Arup's review has had to consider all of the outdoor and indoor locations in the town centre that could possibly facilitate the market based on available space, in light of these issues. Arup added additional criteria to the original GVA/The Retail Group criteria, in order to encompass the current issues. The criteria used to assess the possible locations were:

- Planning policy (conformity with existing plans for the town centre)
- Urban realm (ability to facilitate events and enhance existing public realm)
- Civil infrastructure (existing physical constraints e.g. utility services, street furniture)
- Viability and vitality (economic performance of the town centre and Walsall Market)
- Accessibility and permeability (considering all vehicular and pedestrian matters)
- Setting (relationship with surrounding buildings, uses and visual impact)
- Deliverability (affordability, risk and programme).

In addition to the early stage consultation that had already taken place (questionnaire to market traders and a round-table discussion with retailers in The Bridge area), the first round of public consultation was undertaken, seeking to understand the public's preferred permanent location for the market, and some high-level design considerations. 600 leaflets were distributed to key retailers in the area, landowners and developers, market customers, and were available for collection from four locations in the town centre for

members of the public. The consultation material was also available online and the web link to this was publicised through direct emails to interested parties, social media and a press release, as well as posters in key locations. Over 120 responses were received via postal return and the internet.

Taking into consideration the revised methodology for the feasibility study assessment of possible locations alongside the results the public and stakeholder consultation to date, The Bridge has emerged from Arup's work as the preferred location for the permanent market.

This preferred location was presented to the Markets Working Group on 10th February 2014. The Group were all in agreement that the revised criteria and subsequent methodology was correct, supporting the robustness of the evidence base that has been produced as a result of its use. Whilst not all in full agreement, the Markets Working Group acknowledged that the preferred location to emerge from this robust process was The Bridge.

Following the last meeting of the Markets Working Group, the design and layout needs additional time to progress and be presented to the Working Group ahead of public consultation, therefore the timeline has been amended to enable a second round of public consultation, proposed to be held 21st and 22nd March.

Next Steps

Arup are working on design, layout and public realm options for the permanent market in this preferred location. These will be used to form a preferred design and layout option that will be presented to traders, stakeholders and the public in a further round of consultation, due to take place at the end of March. Lessons that can be learnt from the first round of consultation will be taken on board to ensure that we are able to engage with as many traders, stakeholders and members of the public as possible during the second and final round of consultation.

The preparation of the future planning application is crucial to the success of this project. Numerous discussions have already taken place between the consultants and the Local Planning Authority and are ongoing, in order to ensure that the supporting evidence base for the eventual planning application is robust. The comprehensive consultation approach that is underway is to ensure that consultation responses and concerns can be considered and worked through, eventually leading to the delivery of a scheme that can be fully supported in planning policy terms.

Timeline

To date

19 th December 2013	Markets Working Group – introduction to the project
10 th - 24 th Jan 2014	Public and stakeholder consultation on location options
23 rd January	Regen Scrutiny Panel – Project update
10 th Feb	Markets Working Group – Report back from location consultation and evidence base options with high-level overview of design and public realm
6 th March	Regen Scrutiny Panel – Project update

Proposed Future Timeline

w/c10th March	Markets Working Group- design options and consideration of a preferred design and layout
w/c 17 th March	Market Traders consultation event and public consultation on preferred location and design options
w/c 31 st March	Markets Working Group - preferred option for Walsall Market, including storage solutions and cost estimates and implementation programme
22nd April	Regen Scrutiny Panel – endorse the Working Group's findings and make a recommendation to Cabinet in April
30 th April	Cabinet – Recommendations for the future location and design of Walsall Market
End of May 2014	Planning Application Submitted

Recommendations

To note the contents of this update report;

To agree that public consultation on the layout and design of the new Walsall Market, based on Arup's recommendations that the market should be located in the preferred location of The Bridge, take place at the end of March;

To agree to receive further reports in line with the timeline presented;

That Members of the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel continue to engage in the work being carried out, through participation in the Markets Working Group, public consultation and the regular updates to the Panel.

Author

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