



Report to Darlaston LNP, 27 March 2006

Regeneration of Bentley Centre

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update the Darlaston LNP on the Council's plans for the regeneration of Bentley Centre and to seek the assistance of the LNP in establishing a project reference group to engage the local community.

Recommendations

The LNP is recommended to:

- (1) Note the contents of this report.
- (2) Nominate up to five of its members to join the project reference group and to suggest up to five local organisations from which representatives can be drawn by Friday 7 April.

Background

Bentley Centre is relatively lively and attracts strong loyalty from local residents. The main retail parade on Queen Elizabeth Avenue is fully let and provides a range of convenience and comparison goods. In addition to the shops, the Centre includes a Library, Church, Playgroup and over 60's Centre. Despite this, the Centre is in need of regeneration following the closure or relocation of key community facilities and the general decline in the quality of the local environment.

The regeneration of Bentley Centre has been identified as a major opportunity in the Borough Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF), approved by Cabinet on 22 March 2006, and a priority in the 2006/07 Darlaston LNP Neighbourhood Plan. Within the context of these strategies, Cabinet agreed a report on the regeneration of Bentley Centre at its meeting on 8 February 2006. Cabinet agreed that:

- (1) The Council should prepare a development model and master plan to guide the regeneration of Bentley Centre including the delivery of a new library.
- (2) Bentley Library should close by April 2006 and that arrangements should be put in place for the interim period and for the delivery of the new library.

A project team, which includes officers from a range of Council services, has been set up to oversee the delivery of the project.

The new library

The initial focus for the regeneration of Bentley Centre is the delivery of a new library. This will enable the Council to deliver an improved service for local residents and act as a focus for the delivery of a range of council and community services. It will also enable the Council to make better use of ICT and improve access for disabled people.

A specification for the new library will be prepared which will set out the agreed requirements for the building and the range of services to be provided. Given the poor condition of the current library and concerns about health and safety, the library will close on 29 April 2006 and interim arrangements will be put in place until the new building is opened.

The interim library service will be delivered through the use of mobile libraries and computer access points will be available at suitable local venues. Details of the interim arrangements are appended and a flyer will be distributed in early April. The completion date of the new library is dependent on the details of the development model which is yet to be finalised. The anticipated period for completing the new library will be communicated to the LNP through the project reference group once the development model has been finalised.

Development model

The Darlaston LNP Bus Tour in July 2005 identified a number of potential regeneration sites in Bentley Centre that are vacant, and in some cases have been the subject of vandalism and anti social behaviour. Redevelopment provides the opportunity for significant environmental enhancement in Bentley Centre by returning underutilised land to beneficial use and by replacing an outmoded library building with one developed to high environmental standards.

The Council is working on how it should approach the development of vacant and under used land in Bentley. This approach, called a development model, will need to consider how the Council can dispose of its sites for development to support the delivery of the new library, and work with public sector partners and the private sector to regenerate Bentley Centre.

Master Plan

A master plan will be prepared and this will help to co-ordinate the physical and environmental regeneration of Bentley Centre. The master plan will examine development opportunities, the use of open space and leisure and community facilities, the scope for environmental improvements and improvements to accessibility including proposals for walking and cycling. A consultant will be employed to prepare the master plan.

Special attention will be given to the planning of the area adjacent to the existing library. It may be possible to relocate the buildings in this area (the

playgroup, over 60s club and public toilets) within the new library building but if this is not possible then they will remain where they are or be relocated elsewhere in Bentley Centre. If facilities need to be relocated the master plan will consider how this can be done to ensure that there is no interruption in the services that are provided.

The master plan will identify the needs and aspirations of the local community (e.g. residents, organisations and businesses) and how these can be incorporated in the regeneration of the Centre. There will be full consultation on the draft masterplan and the community will have the opportunity to comment on individual planning applications submitted by developers, in line with the agreed masterplan.

Community Consultation

The Council is seeking to engage the local community throughout the regeneration project and is setting up a reference group, made up of representatives from the LNP and relevant local organisations. The reference group will have up to 10 members, with five being members of the LNP and the remaining five members being drawn from local representative organisations in Bentley.

The purpose of the reference group is to ensure ongoing communication with the project team. In practice this will involve receiving reports from the project team, commenting on emerging plans and strategies, advising on community consultation and providing feedback to the local community. The reference group will meet every two months, prior to the LNP meeting, to enable regular reports to be given to the LNP. A member of the project team will be responsible for organising and servicing meetings and detailed terms of reference will be prepared by the Council.

The LNP is asked to nominate up to five of its members to join the project reference group and to suggest up to five local organisations from which representatives can be drawn by Friday 7 April. The LNP is also asked to receive reports from the reference group on a regular basis.

Timescales

The project plan is currently being finalised and the following milestones are anticipated:

a) Project team established	March 2006
b) Site Investigations commissioned	April 2006
c) Interim library facilities in place	April 2006
d) Library closed	April 2006
e) Site Investigations reports completed	August 2006
f) Production of a masterplan	September 2006
g) Sites marketed for development	October 2006
h) Planning Permission granted for new library	July 2007

Note: The anticipated opening date of the new library has not been included at this stage as the development model has yet to be finalised.

Annex A: Bentley Library Interim Arrangements

Interim arrangements

Bentley Library is scheduled for closure on Saturday 29th April at 4pm under the plans for the regeneration of the Bentley area.

Focusing on the needs of the elderly and children, arrangements are being finalised to provide an interim library service. Walsall's mobile library will call three times a week to the Bentley area. Two stops of a minimum of 30 minutes will be provided during the week, details of the location, day and times of these will be notified as soon as the existing timetables can be altered to accommodate them. An extended stop on Saturdays 11-1pm & 1.30pm-4pm will be provided and will be largely staffed by colleagues from Bentley Library. These arrangements will be put into place immediately following the closure of the static library.

Initial talks are underway between the Library Service and Bentley Children's Centre to provide a partnership solution to delivering homework support and cradle club facilities in the Bentley area, and also summer activities. There are plans to possibly enhance homework support from the autumn. Links between the schools and the staff from Bentley Library will be maintained through outreach work.

There will be an enhanced Home Library Service provision in the area and services from Walsall Libraries 'Library Link' vehicle, which is specifically aimed at elderly and disabled people, is being investigated.