

Cabinet –18 April 2006

Bentley Centre Regeneration Framework Study

Portfolio: Councillor Adrian Andrew, Regeneration and Enterprise

Service: Regeneration Delivery and Development

Wards: Bentley and Darlaston North

Key decisions: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

Summary of report

This report follows a number of previous Cabinet reports that detail the delivery model proposals for regeneration in Bentley which forms one of the key transformational projects of the Strategic Regeneration Framework (SRF). Contained within the previous report for the 'Regeneration of Bentley Centre' was an initial outline of the development model for the redevelopment of vacant sites and the library that would be subject to clarification and justification in the Framework Study. At the meeting 8 April 2006 Cabinet resolved "*that the proposed development model and the preparation of a masterplan to guide the regeneration of Bentley Centre including the delivery of a new library be approved*" (Cabinet Minutes, April 2006). At the previous meeting of Cabinet, 1 March 2006, Cabinet also resolved that "*a departure from current policy, on this occasion, to earmark receipts from the disposal of current library sites to cover the cost of re-provisioning and refurbishing libraries in the capital programme*" (Cabinet Minutes, March 2006). On the basis of Cabinet's resolution a Framework Study for Bentley Centre was commissioned and has produced and a series of recommendations to include the recommended development model.

This report details the key findings of the community-led, consultancy-produced Framework Study for Bentley Centre. The recommendations of the framework study have been formed following extensive consultation with partners and the Bentley community. The Bentley Project Reference Group (PRG) has been integral in leading the community participation in the framework's development and the positive response to such comprehensive consultation has set a precedent for future stakeholder engagement in SRF projects.

The recommendations of the Framework Study can be found in Appendix A of this report whilst the timescales and resources required for the delivery of the recommendations are contained in the framework programme, attached as

Appendix B. The spatial framework for redevelopment and enhancement of the local centre is graphically shown in Appendix C

Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

- (i) Support the recommendations detailed in the Bentley Centre Regeneration Framework Study, as set out in Appendix A.
- (ii) Authorise the delivery of the Bentley Centre Regeneration Framework Study, as set in the framework programme as set out in Appendix B.
- (iii) Approve the development model for the delivery of Bentley's new library as set out below, and reaffirm support for the use of the capital value created from the disposal of council assets in Bentley to define that development model.

Resource and legal considerations

A number of Council and privately owned sites as previously identified to Cabinet are recommended for development within the Framework Study, Cabinet were advised that the *“disposal and development of the sites is fundamental to the successful regeneration of Bentley Centre”* (Regeneration of Bentley Centre, April 2006). The capital value raised through the sale of Council owned development sites and the release of restrictive covenants in the Council's favour on other privately-owned sites will facilitate the building of Bentley's new library: This approach towards the use of receipts from land sales and released covenants was approved by Cabinet 1 March 2006 and 8 April 2006. The development opportunities in Bentley have been identified as a direct result of the Framework Study and thus the potential capital receipts that could be achieved through land sales had not been identified prior to the regeneration activity commencing in Bentley.

The development model recommended within the Framework Study indicates that the library would be delivered through a development agreement between the Council and a developer partner. A package of Council owned sites would be conveyed (for proposed residential development) in return for the developer building the new library and the Council receiving a potential capital receipt (a sum of the difference between the total land value and the developer's costs to build the library). This model would therefore package sites and rather than the total land sale value coming direct to the Council as a capital receipt, the land would be marketed to developers with a requirement to build the library. Developers would bid for the land based on a clear understanding of the likely cost to build the library to a specification achieved through a design competition.

This would be the agreed development model for the library unless it is considered that the Council would achieve better value by receiving a capital receipt for the total land sale value and procuring the library itself. This can be

tested by inviting developers to include in their submission for the development sites two bids, one that includes the library procurement (as recommended in the framework study) and one that excludes it and invites a capital receipt alone with the Council procuring the library itself.

The Framework recommended development model, which includes the library in the development package, offers the Council the opportunity to achieve value for money as a developer will regenerate vacant sites whilst also delivering a key regeneration project, and may also produce a capital receipt in addition to the library itself. The model would see the value raised from land sales placed directly back into the Bentley community. By selecting a developer to build the library the Council is able to prioritise delivery and is able to overcome any problems with cash flow management that may occur through a traditional procurement route. However if it is considered that it would be beneficial in financial and risk management terms to the Council to sell the sites and use the receipt to procure the library itself then this second development model option may instead be considered. At the end of the marketing period for the sites and once all bids have been received an exercise that determines best consideration of both development model options will take place.

The anticipated value held in the Council-owned sites and in privately owned sites will require approval of the sale to a selected developer by Cabinet. Cabinet will therefore be provided with an opportunity to determine the development model option that provides best value.

The procurement of the developer partner for the library is currently subject to further consideration and will follow from the completion of the library design competition, and the preparation of development briefs for the individual housing sites.

Financial resources to undertake other projects within the framework programme will be required. A bidding process for capital funding alongside a proactive approach to securing external grants and developer contributions (through S106 agreements) will take place to close the funding gap outlined in Appendix B and ensure the comprehensive delivery of the Framework Study.

It has been recommended in the Framework that the procurement of a new library for Bentley follows a design competition approach to bring forward an innovative, sustainable and functional design for the new library. Having won the competition an architectural practice would then produce a design and specification to enable a developer to build the library. The design competition would incur project management fees and designer fees and these costs would be met through the overall library build budget.

The building of a new library for Bentley will not have any implications on revenue budgets as staff costs and running costs will be resourced from existing budgets.

Citizen impact

The wider SRF programme in which Bentley falls will bring regeneration benefits to many communities living within the district centres and priority neighbourhoods of the Borough. The potential opportunities and regeneration benefits have already been outlined to the Bentley community through successful engagement activity and there is a sense of interest and excitement amongst local residents.

The regeneration benefits for Bentley citizens brought by the successful delivery of the Framework Study will include; a wider residential housing choice, a centre for learning in the form of the new library, a quality local environment, and new community facilities focused in the 'hub' of the local centre.

Community safety

Current vacant sites and under-used green spaces are being subjected to vandalism and related anti-social activity including littering, graffiti and fly tipping. The Bentley Framework Study brings forward proposals to redevelop a number of problem sites, so that a new positive use can be found.

New buildings and estate layouts will offer the opportunity to incorporate Secured by Design standards to ensure that crime is designed out of new developments. The partnership approach to regeneration being adopted for Bentley will involve the support of other agencies (Safer Walsall Borough Partnership, West Midlands Police, and Walsall Housing Group) to take a joined-up approach to community safety.

Environmental impact

The Framework Study for Bentley provides a clear statement of the expectation for high quality design for new buildings and the public realm.

The new library and other developments in the local centre will be of a high design quality to ensure the local environment is improved and a standard for future development is set. The high quality design for the library will be achieved through the design competition that will be project managed jointly by the Council and Royal Institute British Architecture. The competition will procure an architect to work with the community and officers to produce a specification that is fit-for-purpose and demonstrates quality and innovation. An emphasis on improving green space along with the streetscape around the local centre features in the framework.

Performance and risk management issues

A series of risks are associated with the disposal and development of sites and the successful accumulation of capital receipts to deliver Bentleys' new library and other improvements. A risk assessment has been undertaken and is under regular review:

i) Lack of market interest in development sites and sale proceeds from the disposal of sites are not high enough to support the delivery of the new library. The Framework Study is not only a delivery mechanism but it will also be an important document for marketing the development opportunities in Bentley. Detailed site investigations have been undertaken and site conditions have been considered in the estimated values of potential capital receipts from land sales. The sale of a package of Council sites could prove more attractive to a developer than individual stand alone sites, and an agreement to build the library as part of this package would present an opportunity for achieving best value. This would be achieved as the construction costs of building the new library are transferred to the developer to manage within their profit margins, the regeneration of derelict sites takes place through the developer's other development activity and the Council is likely to benefit from a potential capital receipt and section 106 contributions.

ii) The redevelopment of Council owned 'open space' as defined by the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) can not take place as this departure from the UDP can not be upheld. The Council will be seeking to obtain outline planning consent for a residential use on the Council owned sites and this package will be marketed with consent thus making the package of sites more attractive and reducing the risk to a developer. The loss of UDP designated open space will be offset against the enhancement of Cairn Park and the potential to agree Section 106 contributions towards open space improvements.

iii) The costs involved in delivering other aspects of the Framework Study, for example the improvements to the public realm, over and above the library can not be delivered due to lack of funding. The Framework Study contains values of funding required to deliver projects, such as improvements to the public realm and from these values funding bids can be prepared and the Councils' capital programme aligned in future years to deliver the enhancements.

iv) The community is not continually engaged and not kept informed of progress and thus they become despondent or frustrated, and there is a resistance to the changes. The Bentley community has been engaged in the framework study from the outset and has informed the proposals. There will be further opportunities for community consultation and the PRG will continue to meet. A communications plan exists detailing dates for publicity and marketing activity of the framework.

Equality implications

The delivery of the Framework Study will bring benefits to the whole Bentley community and the redevelopment of sites, the enhancements to the local environment and the building of a new library will present opportunities to engage with many sectors of the community and ensure issues of equality and accessibility are taken into account.

Consultation

A PRG has been formed from representation from the local community, key stakeholders, elected members and nominations by the Darlaston Local Neighbourhood Partnership. The role of the PRG is as an overall project steering group. The consultancy team and officers have actively engaged with the PRG who have endorsed the development of the Framework Study.

As the Framework Study takes on a delivery agenda the role of the PRG will be important in continuing to represent local interests. Members of the PRG along with other important stakeholders identified through community engagement and the study will be invited to participate in project teams set up to oversee the implementation of specific projects within the framework programme.

Three consultation events have been held in September 2006, December 2006 and March 2007. These have successfully engaged local residents in drawing up ideas for Bentleys' future and have sought local opinion on proposals, including the draft Framework Study. Local residents have, and will continue to have, the opportunity to become involved in the regeneration of Bentley by influencing decision making within the projects outlined in the framework programme (appendix B).

Given the momentum of interest developed in the regeneration plans for Bentley the Council will ensure that the local residents are continually engaged and can make a contribution to the future of their neighbourhood. This is important to fulfil the wider regeneration benefits of community pride and building capacity.

Vision 2008

The framework contributes to delivering Vision 2008 in the following ways:

- Ensure a clean and green borough
- Ensure all people are safe and secure
- Encourage everyone to feel proud of Walsall.
- Strengthen the local community
- Listen to what people want.

Background papers

Building a Better Bentley Draft Framework Study

Modernisation of the library service- Cabinet report 1 March 2006

Regeneration of Bentley Centre- Cabinet report 8 April 2006

District Centres Strategic Regeneration Framework- Cabinet report 22 March 2006

Strategic Regeneration Framework Delivery Priorities- Cabinet report 18 October 2006

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Appendix A Recommendations

Maintaining Momentum

In order to ensure that the momentum and expectation built up during the course of the masterplan process is not dissipated it will be essential for Walsall's officer team to secure political and financial commitment to enable the aspirations of the masterplan to be delivered efficiently and effectively. It will also be necessary to ensure that cross-departmental support is secured at an early stage. Without the solid support of the Local Authority the masterplan will be unable to be realised.

Delivery Team

A dedicated resource should be created consisting of Walsall Council officers that have a clear principle commitment to the delivery of the Bentley Centre Framework. A single team project manager should be identified who has responsibility for delivery and authority to seek inputs from others within the authority and to commission essential work externally subject to procurement regulations. The delivery team should have its terms of reference, budget, strategic objectives and operating systems pre-determined and authorised by the Council's Regeneration Committee.

Monitoring Process

The Project Reference Group should become the delivery Steering Group with dedicated officer teams and consultants reporting directly to this group. The terms of reference of the group should include the monitoring of quality, programme and project progress, community issues and performance.

Continuing Community and Stakeholder Involvement

It will be essential that the interest and enthusiasm of the community, generated through the Framework preparation process, is not allowed to dissipate. It will be necessary to devise a process for keeping the community informed and involved. Neighbourhood newsletters should be used to disseminate news to important progress within the area. Consultation should be undertaken on individual projects and a tailored programme of stakeholder and community engagement should be devised to develop the multi use community building project.

Phased Delivery - Project Hierarchy

The Framework process has identified a wide variety of sub-projects that will all contribute to the lasting transformation of Bentley. Financial and process resources will not allow all these important projects to be delivered in parallel and therefore a phased approach to implementation is required.

Priority Projects

The essential early projects are the multi use community building and the central area public realm improvements. These projects once delivered would provide highly visible symbols of change at the heart of the community. Furthermore all the people of Bentley would benefit directly from these investments.

Policy

Although the Framework has not been produced as a policy document it will be necessary where its proposals are in conflict with current land use policy to seek the re-designation of land either through the ongoing LDF process or the adoption of detailed development briefs as SPG. This will be necessary to maximise developer confidence particularly on the sites currently designated as Urban Open Space within the Local Plan. It is further recommended that the feasibility and potential benefits of the Council seeking outline planning consent on sites in its ownership, as an alternative means to overcome the policy constraint and attract developer interest, be fully explored.

Site Investigations

To enable a greater understanding of the historic importance of the Bentley Cairn site a further site investigation is recommended. This would have the dual purpose of determining the nature and extent of archaeological remains and therefore identifying the potential impact on adjacent residential development fronting the park development proposed in the area masterplan.

Guidance

All development sites should be the subject of detailed development and design guidance produced either in the form of Development Briefs or simpler Design Briefs. Development Briefs should contain adequate technical information to help reduce developer risk and uncertainty. Guidance documents should set out design principles as well as content, format and land use information. It is further recommended that a public realm design guide be developed to ensure that all public realm works are consistently developed to a high standard.

Stimulate the Market

It will be necessary to produce promotional material to help stimulate developer interest in the Bentley sites. It is recommended that this take the form of a printed brochure which could also be used to communicate the Framework, and the projects within it, to the local community. This may consist of an executive summary of the Framework document but will need to be reformatted to allow easy access to the target audiences. Dependent upon initial levels of market interest it may be advisable to host an event aimed at the housing developer market. It is important that interest is maximised to ensure the receipts from land sales are as positive as possible.

Multi Use Community Building Procurement

The Library will be the highly visible flagship project that more than anything else will symbolise the renaissance of Bentley. For this reason it is recommended that, in partnership with the MLA and the wider Library sector, architects are identified who have demonstrated excellence in Library design and that a brief is written that contains the very latest thinking from the library sector on local neighbourhood libraries and service provision. Selection of the short listed Architects should involve the community. It is recommended that the delivery of the community building results from a development agreement, related to the packaging of sites in Council ownership and their sale to a private sector developer (subject to market interest). The private developer would build the facility to a pre-determined brief and specification.

Maintenance and Aftercare

It is essential that the maintenance and aftercare of implemented Framework projects is considered from an early stage in project development. The revenue implications of all capital projects, over the short, medium and long terms, needs to be robustly identified and factoring into the budget planning and funding process. It is recommended that well resourced maintenance agreements and regimes are developed in parallel to priority projects. This also has far reaching implications in terms of establishing sustainable management arrangements for facilities such as the multi-use community building and the proactive management of the local centre.

Community Involvement

The two community involvement events, undertaken as integrated elements of the Framework preparation process, have been highly successful. In response to the level of interest generated amongst local people and the nature and extent of the change proposed within Bentley a third event is recommended. This exhibition based event should seek to further validate the vision and ten commitments for change and invite comment on the draft Framework.

Conclusion

The regeneration of the centre of Bentley is an achievable project. The funding that can be derived through various mechanisms resulting from land disposal and development will be adequate to initiate the programme of change although public sector gap funding will enable specifications and quality thresholds to be raised. The delivery team must be ambitious and set design standards for the heart of Bentley as high as is practicable. This is a rare opportunity to re-define the centre of a community and must not result in cosmetic change or community apathy.

Visible transformation will indicate to all that the longterm cycle of decline experienced by Bentley has now been comprehensively reversed. Public sector commitment and private sector confidence demonstrated by concentrated investment activity will start to change the community perception of their 'village' as well as changing developer and investor perceptions of the potential and value of Bentley.

The anticipated land value increases resulting from the successful delivery of the Phase one Framework projects will stimulate increases in land and property values which will in turn deliver additional receipts to feed into the longer term projects. A positive cycle of change will have been established.

The delivery of the full Framework will nevertheless be challenging but the raw material of Bentley is strong and the village ambiance, the sense of identity and the supportive and positive community provide those charged with delivery change with the best possible chance of success.

Appendix C

Area Masterplan

Key

- Mixed Use or Housing
- Library
- Public Open Space Enhancement
- Residential
- Improved Public Realm
- Tree Planting
- Playground
- Gardens Extended
- Access Road
- Mixed Use
- Public Realm Improved Specification
- Site Enhancement
- Improved Pedestrian Access
- Vehicular Access
- Gateway Enhancement
- Estate Remodelling Boundary
- Junction Improvement
- Shop Front Enhancement
- Shop Canopy

