

AT A MEETING
- of the
**REGENERATION, HOUSING,
ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL**
held at The Council House, Walsall on
Thursday 3 November 2005 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Anson
Councillor Robinson
Councillor Rochelle
Councillor Rose
Councillor Yasin

Councillor Shires (attended at 7.40 p.m.)

The meeting was opened by the clerk to the meeting who requested members to nominate a chairman for the duration of the meeting. The following nomination was AGREED: -

- Councillor Robinson be chairman for the duration of the meeting.

Councillor Robinson in the chair.

CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Members noted the following change in membership for the duration of the meeting: -

Delete: Councillor Harrison
Substitute: Councillor Rochelle

APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Arif, Councillor Aslam, Councillor Johnson, Councillor Andrew, Councillor Longhi and Jamie Morris.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Councillor Robinson welcomed the opportunity to chair the regeneration scrutiny panel this evening. He apologised for the number of members sending apologies and advised this was due to exceptional circumstances.

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2005

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting 15 September 2005, a copy having been previously circulated, be agreed and signed as a correct record.

Notes of the Car Park Work Group 30 September 2005

Members agreed that the notes of the Car Park Work Group, a copy having been previously circulated, be agreed and signed as a correct record.

Car Park Work Group 2 November 2005.

Councillor Robinson advised that members had attended the car park working group on the previous evening and had received more information from officers about consultation and discussed the approach being taken with the consultant. Councillor Robinson advised that the work group had focussed on staff car parking and the work group had reached a stage where it had suggested a questionnaire be circulated to staff to clarify the current position. Councillor Robinson advised that this had raised concerns that there is potential to set a hare-running and cause unrest with staff relating to car parking. Members recognised that this was a controversial area of work, but also that the feedback of information relating to staff car parking was essential to formulate an effective strategy for the town centre and out lying districts. Councillor Robinson advised that at a previous car park meeting both portfolio holders had bought into the car parking strategy and were aware of the staff parking within the town centre on long stay car parking. He said that it was essential to recheck with portfolio holders and check that they are still on board. He suggested, subject to portfolio holders approval the communication unit could be requested to circulate the questionnaire on behalf of the car parks working group with a purpose of evidence gathering for the review to feed into the car park strategy early next year.

There followed a period of questioning. Councillor Yasin asked about staff transferring to Fujitsu, members were advised that the relevant information was not available at the meeting. Keith Stone reminded members that there were other factors including car parks in private sector development to be taken into consideration, for example, Shannons Mill and the Waterfront developments. He advised that the consultant has to factor in all areas and at the end of the process there should be an effective car park strategy for Walsall.

Councillor Carol Rose advised that the Crown Wharf development has created traffic flow problems in and out of Walsall Town Centre due to cars queuing to use the barrier payment system and gain access to the car park.

Councillor Anson voiced concerns that there were over 1,200 car park passes issued to staff within Walsall with only 1,000 possible parking places. He indicated that there were staff driving around the town centre trying to find a car parking space and endorsed the necessity for staff to complete a questionnaire to highlight the problems encountered by the staff themselves and to indicate the preferred parking options of staff

Councillor Robinson thanked members for their comments.

Telecommunications 3G Work Group

Officers advised that the dates had been arranged for Telecommunications 3G Work Group to meet with Telecom relating to one network in Walsall Town Centre for 3G technology phones. In response to members questions Martin Yardley explained that micro antennae would be dispersed around the town centre. Councillor Robinson queried whether this would mean eventually all telecommunication masts would cease to be needed. Members were advised that by Christmas 2005 the 2G network would be exhausted and there would be a need for 3G to come online. Members were further advised that the theory goes that the reduction of 2G technology and removal of telecommunication masts should follow the introduction of 3G technology. Members welcomed the scrutiny of the technology and the report to cabinet.

KEY DISCUSSIONS – WALSALL STRATEGIC CORRIDOR

Simon Tranter and Stuart Freeman were in attendance to give a presentation to members relating to the Walsall Strategic Corridor.

Members were advised that nationally the concept of channelling activity towards the delivery of strategic corridors and gateway project is recognised as part of the infrastructure necessary to support ascertained programme of economic, social and environmental regeneration. The infrastructure will create the impetus for the creation of new jobs, improving transport connections, attracting new investment to development of brown field sites, strengthening existing communities and attractive new residential development.

Members were advised that at a sub-regional level the Black Country Consortium had prioritised the creation of a network of gateway beacons to demarcate the entry points to the Black Country across the sub-region as well as reflecting the diverse and distinctive qualities of its constituent communities.

They were advised that whilst locally Walsall Strategic Borough Partnership through the work of its economic forum has prioritised the need to improve Walsall's image in order to help support the sustained economic regeneration of the borough.

Simon Tranter outlined the regeneration of the strategic corridors and gateways indicating the following points: -

- Development of a distinctive brand for Walsall which promotes the boroughs major assets;
- Harnessing potential development opportunities at gateway locations;
- Creation of quality environment in key locations, support existing businesses and residential communities, and attract people into the borough of Walsall;
- Development of local district themes, which help to strengthen local identity and have strong local support.

He outlined the priorities for action including: -

- Road corridors – based upon Walsall's primary highway network;
- Canal corridors – Walsall Canal, Wryley and Essington;
- Railway corridors – both Walsall to Wolverhampton and Walsall to Birmingham;
- Strategic gateways – major transport roads/junctions on the boundaries of the borough or within key entrance points, such as, Walsall's bus and railway stations. Members viewed a plan of the Walsall Strategic Corridors.

Simon Tranter outlined the resources required and highlighted the following points: -

- Improvements will need to be achieved through the improved co-ordination of existing council and partner resources/activities and the targeting of existing resources in a more focussed way, such as through the targeted use of enforcement activities;
- Influencing partner priorities to share the vision for corridors and gateways and to encourage them to work in the council to deliver;
- Influencing private development opportunities;
- Using existing capital projects and regeneration activities to achieve initial impact;
- Seeking to secure private sponsorship support for gateway improvements from major developers, employers and external partners in Walsall.

In summary of the presentation, Simon Tranter outlined the good practice examples in the borough, these being: -

- Design frameworks for A454 and A461;
- Bradford Street interchange;
- Brownhills District Centre;
- Local transportation package (LTP).

He further outlined the learning points as follows: -

- Impact on regeneration is maximised when partners work together to achieve a common purpose;
- Comprehensive approaches work best;
- Council resources work harder "more bangs for bucks"!

On completion of the presentation members were invited to ask questions and points of clarification.

Councillor Anson requested some information relating to the Darlaston SDA and highlighted the other major project in his view as being the Bradford Bus Station Interchange.

Stuart Freeman indicated that officers were currently looking at options to improve public transportation in the borough, in particular, gateways from Darlaston to the Bradford interchange. He indicated this area had been identified as an unwelcoming

gateway to the borough. He said it was necessary to have strong sign-up and links with the private sector to regenerate this gateway.

Councillor Rochelle welcomed the work carried out by regeneration team to present floral displays on the gateways into the borough; he said that good design is essential to capture the public eye and make the gateways more attractive.

Councillor Rochelle questioned whether the report of a statue on the Brownhills gateway island of a miner was correct; he welcomed the idea of brightening up the gateways to the borough, in particular, the design of Brownhills Centre was of interest. He stated that the Silver Street one way system would be welcomed by members and would help relieve traffic congestion along Brownhills High Street.

Councillor Yasin referred to the regeneration of Darlaston and the Darlaston SDA project. He asked how officers intended looking at the other 5 or 6 district centres and how all of the regeneration of district centres was to be incorporated into the plans for this year. In response Simon Tranter advised that the town centre regeneration had attracted a lot of European funding and that regeneration and clearing up of public open space was attracting heritage funding. He outlined the hierarchy of funding to members and indicated that the council's own funding could be redirected to areas that were not attracting external funding, in particular, local centres such as Aldridge. He indicated to members that how we utilise the funding available to the council would ensure regeneration throughout the borough. He also indicated that private sector development and private funding through 106 agreement was essential to the regeneration of the borough generally.

Keith Stone referred to design framework for the A454 corridor, he said that one of the benefits of it was it created its own momentum and that the A454 was like the front garden of your house by dressing the front garden in a way to encourage investment in the borough.

Councillor Rochelle referred to local area agreements and indicated there was hope for some funding through the area based funds. Once again he congratulated the officers on planting on routes into the borough.

Councillor Yasin discussed planning ahead and forward planning for Town and District Centre regeneration, he indicated that this would take 10 to 15 years. Councillor Robinson concurred with this; he welcomed the flowers and plants on the corridors to make the district look nice, however, questioned what officers would do to attract funding to the borough to make gateways into the borough better. Officers responded that there were a range of options available through the study: -

- The highway network itself
- The existing infrastructure (housing, derelict houses and improving the appearance of houses on the routes into the borough).
- Scrap yards – development opportunities working with the private sector to generate interest in brown sites and derelict or untidy sites.
- To make the corridor attractive and add to the appeal of the borough.

- To furbish guard rails with plant pots and keep guard rails and crossing points the same along a stretch of road to smarten the appearance of the street furniture.

Keith Stone advised that attractive corridors was all about making it attractive to the eye and attractive to businesses to want to come and work within the Walsall district. In response to Councillor Rochelle's questions, Keith Stone advised that there was currently a policy underway to encourage local businesses to sponsor traffic islands and keep them looking attractive to attract investment in the borough.

The chairman, Councillor Robinson thanked Simon Tranter and Stuart Freeman for the presentation and noted the contents of the presentation.

WALSALL MARKET IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Bryan Pell was in attendance at the meeting to give a presentation on the Best Value Review of Walsall Street Markets February to July 2005. He advised that the review had concluded that the market service should remain in council control, but made a range of recommendations for service improvement across the full range of service activity. The key points of the improvement action plan were outlined: -

- Action Plan based on review recommendations;
- Consultation with staff and traders;
- Cabinet report on the 30 November 2005;

Bryan Pell advised that the areas for short-term improvement had been highlighted and gave a brief description of each of the short-term improvements: -

1. Market management – he outlined the following brief points:
 - Business planning process – annual basis.
 - Setting out performance indicators/targets.
 - Reviewing licence agreements/conditions (maybe new) and active enforcement.
 - Contracts being renewed.
 - Linking in with trading standards.
2. Cleanliness and appearance:
 - Vehicles – people on ground on a full-time basis, the vehicle has now been taken out of service in the market place.
 - The quality of goods – food, in particular out of date food, being managed more carefully in conjunction with environmental health officers.
3. Lettings:
 - Move from a tender base to a rent base letting procedure.
 - Looked pilot Tuesday and Friday markets.
 - To reduce the number of casual traders to get them licensed and to consider issuing a premium charge to casual traders on Walsall market.

4. Security:
 - Cash and safety of market traders.
 - Market traders being encouraged to set up bank accounts and a non cash system gearing them to work towards non cash systems on markets.
 - To link into radio link/CCTV/police.
 - To have regular liaison meeting.
 - To restart the market traders association meetings.

5. Markets team:
 - Environmental health and trading standards.
 - To look at the structure of the markets team.

6. Accommodation:
 - Serious structural problems with the warehouses and offices accommodations of the market traders.
 - Temporary warehouses set up due to the structural problems are likely to stay in place until an alternative permanent solution is found.
 - The offices will have to move to shop accommodation in the Digbeth until late 2006 to enable structural repairs.

7. Shoppers longer term vision:
 - Links to many of the initiatives Walsall Regeneration Company major developments/quality streets improvement.
 - Market look and relation to shops.
 - Developing customer standards.
 - Market – a genuine attraction, more people coming back to the markets.
 - Development model to invest in service and managed on the cheap.
 - A need to invest into the market place.
 - The market needs to be dynamic, interesting and vibrant.
 - Need to consider a themed market.
 - Layout and attractiveness is essential to encourage people back to the markets.

In summary of the presentation and of the longer term vision discussed members were advised that the issues they needed to consider are as follows:-

1. How to generate the necessary financial investment.
2. How to achieve a step change in management and link to town centre management.
3. How to get buying from key stakeholders.
4. What is the role of elected members?

There followed a discussion and members were invited to question and ask for points of clarification from the presentation.

Councillor Carol Rose said that Walsall Market had use to be one of the largest markets in the Midlands and had attracted visitors from all over the borough,

however, more recently the market has vastly reduced in size and quality and lacked in cleanliness. She further indicated that the toilet facility at the market had been closed down due to the structural problems. Bryan Pell advised that the structural engineer had closed down the toilets; he indicated that the problems identified by the structural engineers had been so severe, the warehouse building and toilet facilities had to be evacuated and out of commission within 5 weeks. He advised that he had managed to secure a number of containers for market traders to store stock in but that this was not a long term solution. He indicated that redevelopment of the site, in particular, Goolds and the Shannon Mill development would take place within 2 to 3 years and it was likely the temporary situation in the market place would continue until that time.

In response to member's queries about the car park facility in Lower Hall Lane, members were advised that the car park is currently privately owned and that the council leased the facility. In response to further questions relating to redevelopments in the area, Mr Pell advised that following Christmas 2005 the Asda stores development would commence in the market place and that it was envisaged that later in 2006 the Shannons Mill scheme would be commenced. He identified that there would then be a third phase of redevelopment which would be the market place and Digbeth areas.

Councillor Rose asked for an explanation why the market traders had left Walsall Market. Mr Pell advised that trade on the market place had decreased since the closure of Sainsburys store at the top of High Street. He said that the Asda development in George Street would create additional parking and that people would want to come back to the market place. In response to further questions Mr Pell advised that officers were not waiting until the developments had been completed and that the market plots would be re-marketed following Christmas 2005. The reason for this being that officers felt marketing before Christmas would encourage Christmas traders only and they wanted a long term commitment from future market traders. Members were in agreement with this course of action indicating the need to protect the public from dubious traders by having a permanent record and a contract with market traders. Mr Pell advised that when market traders receive a licence they are obliged or will be obliged to display it on the market stall giving the name and address of the market trader.

Councillor John Rochelle thanked Bryan Pell for his presentation. He indicated that alot of competition on markets was coming from car boot sales and low priced stores within the town centre. He advised that members should be looking to café squares and up to date markets with themes.

Councillor Anson requested clarification whether Walsall market was to be relocated. Mr Pell said that it was not possible to respond to that question at this time, however, he could advise the panel that the whole of the market area will be looked at as the third stage of regeneration of the town centre market place. There followed a period of discussion where members considered a themed market and regeneration of the market is not just about filling stores but encouraging quality goods and a permanence of quality in the market place. Councillor Yasin highlighted the problems of parking and toilets at this stage deterring traders and market users in the borough.

Councillor Robinson thanked all members for the discussion and Bryan Pell for the presentation and suggested that following the cabinet report a work shop be arranged to consider different styles of market stalls and themed markets.

RESOLVED

That the presentation be noted and that a special work shop be arranged to consider the style of markets available.

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

The report to cabinet on 7 September 2005 Beacon Index – Quarter 1 Performance 2005/6 was submitted: -

(see annexed)

Keith Stone advised that a performance information work shop had been arranged and taken place on the 20 October 2005. He advised that this had been an opportunity for the panel to get a greater understanding of performance information and to interpretate data. Councillor Yasin advised that the work shop had been of great use to the members in attendance and thanked officers for the opportunity to gain a greater understanding.

Keith Stone took members through the report highlighting in particular the 'exceptions' within the environment performance indicators. Mr Stone indicated level 2 pledge delivery section 2.1.1 the pledge to ensure a clean and green borough and that the increase in proportion of household waste recycled and composted to 25%. Mr Stone indicated the enormity of this indicator, he advised that the recycling of waste had to be increased and that his officers were currently working to promote recycling in the borough. He said that there were significant financial penalties if the council could not increase recycling by 25% as indicated in the performance data. Members listed a number of problems with the current recycling receptacle: -

- It was inconvenient and difficult to pick up.
- Following collection, recycling bins were scattered around and not placed back at the user's door.
- To large to keep in doors, takes up to much space.
- Members of the public unaware of what can be recycled.
- Misused for storage.

Members considered the next exception 2.2.3 – The construction of major improvement on through route from the Arboretum to Pleck Road junction. Members were advised this was currently showing amber due to the delay of final funding approval from government.

Members considered 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.3 – to ensure all people are safe and secure. Members considered the current position showing red, amber and green on issues relating to crime reduction and anti-social behaviour and referred to Mr Nozmul Hussain's presentation to regeneration panel at its last meeting. Councillor Robinson voiced concerns that pledge 2.3.3 was showing as a green when it had recently been

released to the press that there had been delays in the implementation of alley gating schemes in crime hotspots across the borough. He requested that Nozmul Hussain be invited to attend the next regeneration scrutiny panel to give a short presentation on the current position with all 3 indicators.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Beacon Index report be noted;
2. That Nozmul Hussain be invited to the next meeting of the regeneration scrutiny and performance panel to discuss indicators 2.3.1, 2.3.2 and 2.3.3.

QUARTERLY MONITORING OF ENVIRONMENT INSPECTION

Keith Stone gave a verbal presentation to members relating to the current position of the environment improvement plan. He outlined: -

- The current position relating to the preparation of the car parking strategy.
- The option appraisal and advised work had been delayed and would be concluded in March next year and would be considered nearer that time.
- The traffic management scheme utilities, he advised that these could be changed and that they could not be implemented until regulations had gone through March 2007. Martin Yardley clarified that there were funding implications in relation to this and if not accepted the council could not receive funding of £9,000,000. He indicated the explicit link between this and CPA.
- Keith Stone advised that the review of environmental enforcement; officers had changed tasks and put together an improvement plan following a successful seminar an improvement plan had been drawn up intending to respond to that. Keith Stone advised that the PFI project proposed integrated transport package was on line with the final hurdle going to government with prospective partner in tow to set up a scheme. He indicated there was bigger funding gap than anticipated so the government was being slow to approve.

In summary Keith Stone advised there were 5 or 6 exceptions on the environment plan and that he would ensure that a full report would be brought to the next meeting of this panel on the 11 January 2006 giving details of each of these exceptions and the current position.

RESOLVED

1. That the Environment Inspection Report be received.
2. That a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

FORWARD PLAN

Members received the list of items of interest on the Forward Plan 19 October 2005. Councillor Rochelle indicated the control of mercury omissions from Streetly Crematorium; strategy guidance proposed reductions to mercury omissions from crematoria and options available to the council due to go to cabinet on 30 November 2005. He queried the status of the Streetly Crematoria at this time and asked for clarification outside this forum. Members were advised that the mercury omissions were due to the content of mercury in teeth and were advised that further information would be available at the next meeting when Judith Sunley is due to give a presentation on bereavement services to members.

Members referred to the Darlaston Strategic Development Area strategy procedures due to go to cabinet on the 18 January 2006 and requested that a report be brought to the next scrutiny meeting on the 11 January 2006 relating to Darlaston SDA.

DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Members noted the dates of the special budget consultation meeting on the 25 November 2005, the next normal panel meeting on the 11 January 2006 and the date of the working groups as set out on the agenda.

TRAINING FOR MEMBERS

Members noted the training sessions set out on the agenda. Members noted the importance of attending training sessions. Debbie Breedon advised that the members quarterly training brochure and members digest contained information of further training events which maybe of interest to scrutiny members.

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 8.00 p.m.