

# **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 22nd November, 2012

**Present:-** Councillor Ian Matthews – in the Chair  
Councillors Mrs Astle, Cairns, Fear, Holland and Olszewski

## **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Miss Baker, Councillor Lawton, Councillor Mrs Peers, Councillor Studd, Councillor M. Taylor and Councillor Wilkes.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

## **4. NEWCASTLE TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC REALM PROJECT**

The Committee considered a report regarding the working group recommendations for the replacement provision of town centre trees in High Street and Hassell Street as part of the town centre public realm and market refurbishment project.

The Council had been working to improve the town centre for some time, more uniformity to the market was required and the views of all kinds of stakeholders had been sought. The principle aims of the plans were to improve the market by making provision for bigger stalls (which had been a trader request) and changing the orientation of the stalls. A lot of aspects of the market worked well, however it was necessary to address some negative issues. For example, traders built out their stalls to enlarge trading space. There were also storage boxes, bins and empty packaging stored opposite retail premises, which made the market look untidy. Appendix two of the report showed the proposed new layout of the market as two strips of stalls with the market traders in the middle facing outwards. The shoppers would be on the pavement, thereby creating a retail walkway. The proposed new stalls would be 10ft wide by 15ft deep. If the town centre trees remained as they currently were, it would result in some stalls having a tree directly in front of them, which would make the pitch less desirable. It was necessary to try to find balance in the design and layout of the new proposals for the market.

Since the report had been published comments had been received from community safety partners that CCTV visibility was affected by the trees as they currently were as people being tracked were lost when they went under tree canopies. Officers from the Landscape section had graded the trees according to their quality and ideally it would be desirable to retain better quality trees. This had been taken into account by Officers. If the proposal in the report was adopted it would result in seven trees and

two stumps being removed and eight trees being replanted, if the tree pits identified were reusable. If the tree pits were on top of a gas main or an electricity supply then they would not be able to be used.

Members of the working group felt the report was good and other Committee members were happy in general with the proposals, although there were some areas of concern. It was highlighted that public seating areas by Edinburgh Woollen Mill and Superdrug would be lost. Officers advised that seating had been considered and there was guidance from the Department of Transport regarding walking distances for people with mobility problems. There was a possibility that seats could be provided by Natwest due to the night-time economy there and also by the Guildhall. This would be looked at after the changes were implemented.

Members questioned what species the replacement trees would be and whether these would be slow or fast growing. Advice from Landscape Officers would be sought with regard to replacements, but the trees in Hassell Street would be more upright in nature and would not have a broad canopy. There was also consideration by Members that two of the proposed trees in Hassell Street could provide a potential highways hazard by creating a pinch point for taxis accessing that area at night. The width of the carriageway on Hassell Street where it narrowed would remain as it was; the narrowness slowed drivers down to help prevent speeding.

Members had spoken to market traders and the majority were in favour of the proposed changes and the traders of fresh produce had confirmed the problem with bird droppings ruining fresh food. It was important to replace the trees that were being removed and Members would be more satisfied if they knew where the trees would be replanted and how the street scene would look. Members considered it important to look at the market in twelve months time to review the effect of the changes and to address any issues.

There was concern that the proposed new layout would create an empty space in the middle of the square by the Guildhall looking towards Hassell Street, and that this space might be taken up by traders parking their vehicles. Officers advised that traders would continue to take their vans off the market when they had unloaded their stock, and the vans would only be allowed to remain when the weather was poor and stock needed to be protected. Members further considered the narrow corridor between the outward facing stalls and retail premises could look poor. A survey was conducted in 2007/08 and it had been considered that opening up the visuals to the Guildhall would be beneficial to the town centre. Also, from a market management point of view there was difficulty filling the market on some days, with people choosing to walk down the pavements and not through the market. Some Members did not agree and were of the opinion that the public were walking in the middle of the market and that if another survey was conducted then a difference might be seen. The aim of the public realm project was to get more customers into shops and on to the market. By funnelling people on to the pathways, this would slow potential customers down, thereby encouraging them to look around and see what the town centre had to offer.

Members noted that there were underground tunnels from the old trading markets in the town centre which dated from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and questioned whether any unknown tunnels would be disturbed by the proposed tree works. Officers advised that historically there were no buildings around the bottom area of the market; the market toll booth had been situated by the Guildhall (near to the present war memorial) in its early days. As part of the preparation for the project, surveys had been conducted regarding underground workings and the five trees proposed for

planting in Hassell Street were clear of underground services. There were services in the vicinity of Barclays at the bottom of the market, but to the best of the Officer's knowledge the tree pits should not encounter problems. However, this would not be known for certain until a dig took place.

All planters in Hassell Street were proposed to be removed, and during the period of 10am to 4pm the space created could be used for entertainment purposes. The proposals were for Hassell Street to be repaved with no kerbs, similar to the area in front of the Guildhall. There was concern amongst members about the bottom of the market furthest from the Guildhall and the effect the removal of trees would have here if they could not be replaced.

Officers were working with Staffordshire County Council Highways department and traffic flow had been tracked. The journey time of buses had been tracked with the view to buses turning right outside of the bus station. Members also considered that the proposed trees in Hassell Street should not be in the way of CCTV, as CCTV was important in that area due to the nightlife. The Business Crime Initiative and the Council's Engineering Manager were aware of the proposals and had not raised any objections.

The Portfolio Holder would consider the Committee's comments carefully. The market did need to be looked at as it was not trading well and organisation was needed. The trees in the town centre did benefit the area and some of the trees by the Guildhall did credit to the building. However, the trees could not be allowed to negatively affect the market. A prototype stall was to be erected in the market and all Members would be notified of this to give them the opportunity to see the proposed new stall design. It was planned that stalls would be bolted to the floor, and if it was deemed that they should be moved it would mean re-laying the foundations for the stalls. Officers noted that if it was deemed that there should be three rows of stalls by the Guildhall then the canopies for the stalls would need to be of a smaller depth.

The concerns raised by the Committee would be passed to Cabinet.

**RESOLVED:** (a) That the information be received.

(b) That the concerns raised be passed to Cabinet for their consideration.

5. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business considered.

**COUNCILLOR IAN MATTHEWS**  
**Chair**