

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 3rd December, 2014

Present:-	Councillor David Stringer – in the Chair
Councillors	Baker, Holland, Loades, Matthews, Owen, Mrs Simpson, Wallace, Wilkes, Williams and Mrs Williams
	Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centres, , Business and Customer Services
Apologies	Councillor White and Chair of Kidsgrove Town Council Community Interest Company

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

Minutes of the previous meeting held on Wednesday 3rd September 2014 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. NEWCASTLE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

An update was provided by the Chair of the Town Centre Partnership on the Newcastle-under-Lyme Town Centre Partnership, Quarter 3 Chair's Report.

Footfall Counters

These were fitted in Quarter 2 on the corner of the Ironmarket and Castle Walk. Percentages had increased by 151.79% from July to August of people visiting Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Property Vacancy Rate

The town's property vacancy rate had seen figures drop by 2.71% in Quarter 3 compared to the same quarter in 2013.

Dragons Den

Due to various setbacks the winner did not open the new business until Quarter 4 along with a number of 'pop-up' stores.

Business Engagement

Town centre businesses were kept up to date of all the Newcastle-under-Lyme Town Centre Partnerships activities via the Talk of The Town Newsletter. This assisted businesses in knowing what is coming up and allowing them the opportunity to capitalise on the events as well as getting involved.

Retail Index Scheme

Town centre businesses were encouraged to partake in the retail index scheme allowing them to benchmark themselves against other town centre businesses.

Newcastle-under-Lyme was trading below expectations but new projects are being identified to generate greater footfall and to improve profitability. Businesses that were trading above expectations were the larger stores; the lowest ones were newsagents and card outlets.

The national average from January through to September was still below expectations due to lack of spending in the town centre.

Bottlecap Film Festival

The Town Centre Partnership repeated the popular event and was well received.

Lyme Card

The Town Centre Partnership was working closely with Newcastle Borough Council team in developing and expanding the existing Lyme Card into a town centre loyalty. It was launched with twenty two businesses to offer discount to anyone who signed up. Jubilee 2 customers automatically received a card. Feedback had been good.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Christmas Light Switch On

The launch of the Winter Wonderland on the Ryecroft development opening coincided with the town centre Christmas lights switch on. The number of website hits had quadrupled.

The Chair enquired about the retail index trading figures falling below average and asked if there were like for like figures?

It was answered that the other town centres were not forthcoming in sharing the figures and the information supplied was only a snap shot.

The card shops were looking at expanding ways of enticing customers by offering complimentary products, such as giftware.

A Member congratulated Newcastle Town Centre and Newcastle Borough Council on the well organised launch of Winter Wonderland.

It was observed that the expenditure of the catchment population was decreasing, but hopefully with Christmas shoppers visiting the town it would increase. Since the commencement of free parking after 3.00pm there had been an increase in footfall.

A Member advised that greater participation was required from the traders. The Roebuck Centre Manager commented that change was encouraged by the Town Centre Manager.

The Chair thanked the Chair of the Town Centre Partnership for attending.

Resolved:- That Committee receive the report.

4. KIDSGROVE TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

The Borough Council's representative of Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership provided an update report.

Marketing

Regular newsletters continued to be hand delivered to every business in Kidsgrove town centre and Butt Lane shops.

The website has gone live and the Kidsgrove Town Centre Community Interest Company (KTCCIC) would be canvassing local businesses to become members asking them to pay £5.00 annual membership in return for which they get an enhanced listing on the website.

Events

The 2014 Christmas shopping challenge was running from 29th November to the 23rd December.

There was an Artisan type market held in the town centre. KTCCIC teamed up with local businesses. This was very successful and warranted for it to be arranged again.

Heritage walks had been arranged around the town and along the canal which were popular.

There were three short and mid-term projects on-going:-

➤ Waterfront Project

To improve the canal waterfront in providing more moorings, improve lighting and security and access to the towpath.

➤ Market Street

Traders were in favour of making Market Street one way in order to solve traffic problems.

➤ Christmas Lights

Consultation took place with residents to see whether they would like to sponsor a bulb for a £1.00 in memory of a loved one on the new tree in the town centre and a lot of positive feedback had been received.

The Chair reported that in the last report the Chair of Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership was to be in rotation.

Councillor Mrs Bates advised that at the last Board meeting a discussion took place of conducting a skills audit. A Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership Board Skills Matrix was tabled.

There were signage issues around the town and a signage strategy was to be looked into.

The Chair requested a balance sheet of how the £10,000 had been invested and the future aspirations.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centres, Business and Customer Services reported that a great deal of progress had been achieved, including expanding the number of business Directors on the Board. The Town Centre Partnership and the Locality Action Partnerships were being encouraged to work together to take the town forward.

A Member advised that the Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership need to start making themselves more well-known and to involve more traders. The Member's personal view was to be careful not to over invest in what is not required and only move forward when people get involved.

Resolved:-

- (a) That a balance sheet is produced at the next meeting showing how the £10,000 had been invested and the future aspirations of Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership.
- (b) That the branding on signage within the town centre be prioritised and discussed with the County Council.

5. NEWCASTLE HOUSING ADVICE CONTRACT MONITORING

The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services provided a summary update to Quarter 2 2014/2015 – Newcastle Housing Advice Monitoring.

There had been an increase in the housing register enquiries at reception.

There had been a decrease in exclusions from 132 in Quarter 1 to 39 in Quarter 2.

The system was focussing more on supporting older people to apply for housing on-line.

Resolved:- That Committee receive the summary update for Quarter 2.

6. JOINT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW PROGRESS

The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services tabled an additional summary of interim results from the Housing Allocations Policy Review. The consultation process was still on-going and one-to-one meetings and group discussions were being held at the Lettings Forum.

The proposed revisions within the Joint Allocations Policy are provided below:-

(a) Fair Assessment of Aspire Tenants and other Registered Provider Tenants

Changes had been requested that the policy would still enable an existing Aspire Housing customer in housing need to apply to the revised policy and be given reasonable preference; however they would not be given any additional priority and would be banded like any other Registered Provider customer. In question 7 of the consultation survey, 79% registered providers agreed and if the tenant had to vacate the property it was agreed this to be treated in the same format. In question 8, 84% registered providers agreed and question 10, again 84% registered providers agreed.

Aspire Housing had also requested the removal of their tenants who had no housing need from band 7. This was being considered in line with the option to give exception to those requiring rehousing for employment and training.

(b) Proposed Changes to Administering the Housing Register

The move to the “Homes Direct” system in August 2014 enabled Officers to review some of the administration processes of the Housing Register.

The present Joint Allocation Policy gives applicants the freedom to make unlimited bids, which allows the applicants the ability to express interest in all properties. The new system had the ability to limit customers to three bids per weekly cycle. Once a customer had agreed to a property they were unable to see further vacant properties. 72% of customers thought unlimited on-line bids was the way forward.

(c) Member Request – Local Connection

Customers were asked if they were in agreement to the on-line system being expanded, 54% agreed.

(d) Member Requests – Ex-Service Personnel

The Council are prioritising applicants through the use of band B to support Ex-Service Personnel settle back into the community following active service.

(e) Members Requests – Equity

The on-line service survey had been agreed by the customers with no recommendations being made to the changes to the equity figures.

A Member asked if there were any legal constraints regarding the local connection requests.

The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services advised that every local authority has local connection criteria.

It was asked where was the 67% response received from. It was responded from a mixture of customers and support staff.

A Member agreed to keep the local connection in place.

Resolved:-

- (a) The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services to bring back to Scrutiny costings if these were not covered by the budget.
- (b) The Head of Housing and Regeneration Services to take back the views of Scrutiny.

7. REVIEW OF NEWCASTLES OF THE WORLD ALLIANCE

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council had been a member of the ‘Newcastles of the World’ partnership since 1998 and had attended the biennial summit on most occasions since.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council sought to re-energise and re-focus the Alliance in response to the “Joint Declaration” that was signed at the end of the 2012 summit and had provided a vast amount of work to the secretariat.

In line with the 2012 and 2014 Declarations there was a commitment to have a paid Secretariat commencing early 2015. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council had committed to the first year’s membership in 2015. If the Council were to consider a second year’s payment in January 2016 this would need to be considered by Cabinet in February as part of the 2015/2016 budget setting process.

A Member felt it no longer gave value for money.

It was advised by a Member that a survey had been carried out. Schools were consulted with the feedback being that the no-one had heard of the Alliance.

Resolved:-

That Cabinet should be advised to withdraw from the Alliance to enable resources to be directed to activities which deliver priority local outcomes.

8. PORTFOLIO HOLDER QUESTION TIME

Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centres, Business and Customer Services was in attendance to provide an update on his priorities and work objectives for the next six months and to answer questions raised by Members.

This year had seen the completion of the scheme with the successful pedestrianisation of Hassell Street and introduction of new market stalls. A market fun day was held during September to promote the new market and to celebrate the history of the market charters.

Ryecroft Retail-Led Redevelopment Scheme

There is continued work with the Council and the County Council to secure a long term use for the Ryecroft site. To deliver a successful redevelopment would require significant resources and time for the preferred developer to further refine the scheme and a Co-operation Agreement will enable this.

Town Centre Partnerships

The Council actively continues to support both the Newcastle and Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnerships.

The Homecoming New Circus Event

Specific Council support was provided to deliver this event. In addition, Officer time supported the Newcastle Town Centre with a successful Arts Council bid.

Business Boost Competition 2014

Another successful competition and an awards event was held at the Keele Sustainability Hub.

Town Centre Subway Improvements

Through Section 106 agreement funding, structural repairs and visual improvements had been made to two key subways in Newcastle town centre.

Education Business Partnership

Through the Council's aims to support local business growth and ensure young people can access employment opportunities the Council was seeking to strengthen links between educational establishments and employers.

Inward Investment

Through working with the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire "Make It" team, the Council was able to have inward investment brochures and advice to companies looking to relocate or develop within the area.

Business Support

Working with Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce to signpost businesses to the Business Helpline and access to Advisors on 0300 111 8002. The Chamber can direct businesses to training and support.

The following questions were raised and answers given:-

Q1: Two points; firstly the Member had been trying to relocate his business to Newcastle and had been unsuccessful in finding premises. Secondly the Member raised concern of the amount of businesses who employ young people in placements but had no work for them to carry out.

A1: The first point the Member agreed to speak to the Portfolio Holder separately. The second point, Newcastle Education Business Partnership had strong interface of partnership providers. PM Training always strove to seek a good outcome.

Q2: Did young Apprenticeships still exist?

A2: Yes. There were a variety of apprenticeship models.

A Member advised that the decorating of the subways had been praised by members of the public and congratulated the Town Centre Partnership. It was asked if there were any funding still available to decorate the remaining subways, funding will be sought through Section 106 agreements where appropriate. The Portfolio Holder advised that the Council was working with Schools and Colleges on this project.

9. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

10. RYECROFT REDEVELOPMENT

The Executive Director Regeneration and Development tabled a high-level plan which had been prepared around 2009/2010 to identify strategic redevelopment opportunities in Newcastle town centre. The review process had highlighted the Ryecroft area as the key opportunity for a retail-led scheme.

Officers of the two Councils had been working closely with retail development consultants, Cushman and Wakefield.

To test the developers' appetite for investing in the Ryecroft area a competitive bidding process was drawn up. As a result of this Cabinet approved the launch of a marketing campaign to attract developer interest in carrying out a retail-led mixed use development to an agreed brief. Three developers were shortlisted from this process and invited to work up an indicative scheme layout and design, with an indicative schedule of uses and unit sizes, target occupiers, a breakdown of estimated costs, values and rents and a financial offer.

The Executive Director Regeneration and Development explained what each developer was proposing and explained how a preferred development partner had emerged. He envisaged being able to report back to Committee in about six months with a final scheme.

RESOLVED:-

- (a) Committee were in agreement for Cabinet to be advised that the selection of Developer A as the preferred development partner for the Ryecroft scheme.

11. HS2 BRIEFING NOTE

The Head of Planning introduced the HS2 Briefing Note which conveyed an up-date on the present proceedings.

On the 28th October 2014 the Chairman of HS2, Sir David Higgins, published his report "Rebalancing Britain". One of his four main proposals was the need to take forward both legs of the HS2 Y-network, his conclusion being that the alternatives would not bring the same capacity, connectivity and economic benefits. In addition to his four main proposals the report set out a series of recommendations from his review of the proposals for Phase 2 of HS2. These included that the line should be extended to Crewe by 2027 – six years earlier than originally planned. The report had been submitted to Government and any final decision on the recommendations would be made by Ministers.

On the 4th November 2014 the Secretary of State announced that he proposed to safeguard a section of the HS2 route – the section between Fradley and Crewe. It was indicated that *"no decision had yet been made on the route for Phase 2 of HS2 ... however evidence to date suggested that the route via Crewe was the best performing option. The Secretary of State was, therefore, consulting on issuing safeguarding directions for this route."*

Response to the safeguarding consultation to the Government ran until January 2015. The Head of Planning suggested Committee ask the Executive Director of Regeneration and Development and the Portfolio Holder for Economic, Regeneration, Business and Town Centres, to consider making comments to the following questions to the Government. These comments would be submitted to Planning Committee for approval on the 9th December 2014:-

1. What are your views on the proposal to safeguard land between Fradley and Crewe
2. What are your views on the content of the proposed safeguarding directions
3. What are your views on the content of the guidance for local planning authorities on the directions

4. What are your views on the proposed approach to determining what land is to be safeguarded
5. What are your views on the draft Impact Assessment

The Chair advised that the Working Group, comprising of Councillors Stringer (Chair), Becket and Loades, had met with representatives from Stoke-on-Trent City Council on the 26th November 2014 to discuss the on-going proposals.

RESOLVED:-

That Committee agree to the Executive Director of Regeneration and Development and the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centres, Business and Customer Services submit a response to the Planning Committee on the safeguarding consultation which would be then be presented to the Government.

12. WORK PLAN

RESOLVED:-

That the following items are added to the work plan:-

18th March 2015

Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership

- That a balance sheet is produced showing how the £10,000 had been invested and the future aspirations of Kidsgrove Town Centre Partnership.
- That the branding on signage within the town centre be prioritised with the support of the County Council and to advise on the future aspirations.

Joint Housing Allocations Policy

- A breakdown of costings are provided if the costs exceed the budget.

Local Plan

- An update to be provided

13. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions had been received from the public.

14. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

15. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 18th March 2015, 7.00pm, Committee Room 1

COUNCILLOR DAVID STRINGER
Chair