

Halesowen Area Committee – Thursday 24th January 2008

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Halesowen Town Centre Development

Purpose of the Report

1. To update Members and the public on progress with regard to physical developments taking place in Halesowen town centre.

Background

2. At the 14 March 2007 Halesowen Area Committee, Members requested that progress reports be presented to future Committees with an update on progress with regard to the development of the Cornbow shopping centre, bus station and town centre management issues. Since the last report presented to Committee on 14 November 2007, officers from the Council have met with representatives from Vale Retail, CENTRO/WMPTA and the Police (Halesowen Regeneration Meeting; 17 December 2007). Over the lifetime of the development period, officers will continue to liaise with Vale Retail, CENTRO/WMPTA and the Police to ensure building works are carried out and communicated to the public in the most efficient and effective way. The Town Centre Working Group of Members and officers met on 16 January 2008 to consider the issues raised by the partners. The Head of Policy, Executive and Support Team will provide a verbal update on the outcomes of the Progress Meeting and Working Group at this Committee.

Cornbow Shopping Centre

3. Vale Retail has confirmed that the project remains on programme. Peacocks have been trading since Thursday 25 October 2007 in their new premises 22/26 Hagley Mall. Steelwork on the western elevation of the new Asda store which faces the bus station is now complete. It is anticipated that major steel work for the rest of the Asda store will have commenced on 14th January 2008. Asda fit out is scheduled to commence in August and be completed in October 2008. The Asda store is scheduled to open in November 2008.

Town Centre Access Study consultation

4. The Group Engineer will provide a short verbal update on the outcomes of the Town Centre Access Study consultation exercise which closed on the 15th January 2008.

De-trunking the A456 and Grange Roundabout

5. The Highways Agency safety scheme designed to address the poor accident record at the Grange junction, developed and consulted on 2 years ago was then estimated to cost £463k.
6. In the intervening period the Highways Agency have revisited their estimate and have increased it to £690k and now believe that this figure more accurately reflects the cost of their scheme. However, since developing the scheme, following a particularly nasty fatal accident in March 2005, the Highways Agency have noted that the accident record at this junction has improved to such an extent that it no longer warrants the priority it was originally given and the funding currently on offer will not be available after 31st March 2008.
7. During the same period the Council have developed the Highways Agency scheme further and have undertook more detailed site investigation and safety audit. The Councils revised scheme also addresses aspirations for the Halesowen Town Centre as promoted in the study currently being consulted on. The Councils revised scheme is estimated to cost £809K although experience suggests that it would be prudent to have an additional contingency sum of say £200k taking the cost to around £1m.
8. The Highways Agency has made it known that they have a budget of up to £750k for this safety scheme and although they believe the safety element of scheme should only cost £690k they have agreed to offer the whole of the budget to meet the Council halfway to the extended scheme estimate of £809k. The current LTP program includes improvements to the Grange junction to be funded from the Integrated Transport Block (IT block) allocations towards the end of the program period. However, the contribution from the Highways Agency would enable the scheme to be brought forward capitalising on the availability of the Councils project partner, "Carrillion", presence in the town centre and a modest investment from head room in next financial years IT block. This would enable acceleration of the LTP program to the benefit if the whole borough.
9. It is anticipated that should this offer be deemed acceptable the necessary administration for handover of the route to the Council as highway authority could be concluded, as a target date, by 24th March 2008.

Halesowen Bus Station and Highway Realignment

10. The bus station site was handed back to Centro-WMPTA on 15 October 2007 by Vale Retail. This enabled Dudley MBC's Framework Contractor, Carillion to commence the bus station redevelopment and associated highway realignment works on site.
11. In order to minimise the impact of the works on Christmas trade, particularly to the Queensway shops most affected by the bus station and highway works, consideration has been given to Queensway traders whereby drainage diversions outside shops have been deferred until after Christmas to encourage shopping in the area. Instead Carillion has brought forward works on other parts of the site.
12. Regular interface meetings are taking place with all partners to ensure the effective coordination of the shopping centre and bus station/highway redevelopments. These will continue for the remainder of Halesowen's redevelopment. The meetings will assist with effectively programming construction activities for the two major construction projects, in order to meet the aspiration that the bus station and highway works are completed within the timescale for the overall redevelopment of Halesowen town centre of December 2008.

Shuttle Bus

13. Centro-WMPTA, Dudley Council and Vale Retail, project partners working together to build a better Halesowen, organised and paid for the circular service (the 'Halesowen Hopper') to help connect shops with temporary bus stops during the town's regeneration. It was introduced after the partners asked for customers ideas on ways to minimise disruption and make life easier while the work takes place.
14. Following customer feedback the bus was rerouted to stop on Church Croft in a bid to increase its popularity, but the Halesowen Hopper has failed to attract enough passengers to keep the service running when it completes its trial at the end of December, therefore the service will not continue.

Town Centre Management

15. Halesowen Chamber of Trade held Halesowen Town Centre's annual Christmas lights event on Saturday 17th November 2007. A fun fair took place throughout the day. Entertainment was hosted by BRMB. The Australian celebrity actor Ben Nicholas (who portrayed Stingray in Neighbours and more recently appeared in Celebrity Scissor Hands) switched on the lights with the Mayor of Dudley Councillor David Stanley and Consort Councillor Jill Nicholls.

16. Entertainment and activities that have taken place in Halesowen include the following:

Monday 26 th November 2007	Halesowen schools performed Christmas carols for the Mayor of Dudley Councillor David Standley and the Mayor's Consort Councillor Jill Nicholls in Somers Square with Mike Walker, Vice President for Sandvik (Europe)
Saturday 1 st December 2007	The "Halesowen History" event featured costumed re-enactments from the Second World War, the English Civil War and Medieval times
Saturday 8 th December 2007	The Accord Barbershop Quartet performed for retailers and shoppers.
Saturday 15 th December 2007	The Jazz Ramblers performed Christmas classics throughout the town accompanied by circus act Brum and Dudley
Friday 21 st December 2007	Mini children's fair in Somers Square
Saturday 22 nd December 2007	Churches Together group held an open-air carol service in Somers Square.

Finance

17. A number of the issues raised within this report have a direct financial implication on the Council. However, all costs detailed which fall on the Council will be funded by existing capital or revenue budgets held within Economic Regeneration Division.
18. Funding for the town centre access study has been found from the Councils Highways Capital Budget for the development of transport strategy. Funds have been allocated for the development of proposals for the Grange (A456) roundabout from the Councils Highways Capital Integrated Transport programme to supplement the Highways Agency funding to develop and implement safety improvements at the Grange (A456) roundabout. Contributions are available from planning obligations (section 106 of the Highways Act) for highway improvements to the town centre.

Law

19. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 enables the Council to do anything which it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of any part of the

Borough. The council will carry out highway improvement/ maintenance work under the Highways Act 1980.

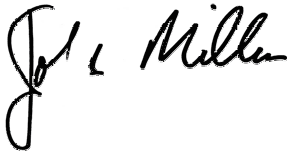
20. The Council is empowered to improve Highways under section 62 of the Highways Act 1980. Traffic Regulation orders are made under powers contained in section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The traffic Calming Act 1992 amends the Highways Act 1980 to allow works to be carried out to promote safety and to preserve or improve the environment. Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Council to do anything calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of its functions.

Equality Impact

21. A principal role of the Town Centre Management Service is to encourage inclusivity amongst all sectors of the community, including the needs of children and young people. The Cornbow shopping centre development responds to the strong demand amongst the local community for the presence of an anchor retail food store. A principal aim of the bus station development is to improve accessibility for all users to and from the town centre in a safe and secure environment. This work has been conducted in full accordance with the Council's equality and diversity policies and should in no way have any prejudicial impact on different racial groups, disabled people, both genders and/or other relevant groups.

Recommendation

22. That the Committee notes the progress of development in Halesowen town centre.



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John B Millar
Director of the Urban Environment

Contact Officers:

Rupert Dugdale
Head of Design and Projects
(01384) 815538
rupert.dugdale@dudley.gov.uk

Martyn Holloway
Group Engineer –
Transportation
(01384) 5426
martyn.holloway@dudley.gov.uk

Wayne George
Regeneration Project Officer
(01384) 81 5428
wayne.george@dudley.gov.uk

List of Background Papers

Background documents used in the preparation of this report: -
Halesowen Area Committee (14 November 2007) *Halesowen Town Centre Development*
<http://cmis/CMISWebPublic/Binary.ashx?Document=9808>