

WARDS: Halesowen South & Belle Vale & Hasbury

AGENDA

ITEM NO.

DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

AREA COMMITTEE – HALESOWEN

15th September 2004

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE – PROPOSED PERMANENT CHRISTMAS TREE

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek the Committee's views on the proposal to install a permanent Christmas tree in Halesowen Town Centre.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Sandvik UK have for a number of years sponsored the provision of a Christmas tree in Halesowen Town Centre, which is installed in November and removed after Christmas. The switching on of the Christmas lights on the tree in November each year has developed into a popular event in the town centre.
- 2.2 In April 2004, Sandvik approached the Council with an offer to sponsor a permanent Christmas tree, utilising an existing raised planter at the junction of Hagley Street and Hagley Road, outside the Safeway supermarket. The location of this planter adjacent to the supermarket and multi-storey car park, shown on Appendix A to this report, means that it is used as an informal seat, and the condition of the shrubs and trees that it contains have deteriorated as a result of this pressure by users. A number of complaints have been received as a result of its poor condition.

- 2.3 A feasibility study has been commissioned to establish the viability and estimated cost of the planting of a permanent Christmas tree and associated facilities. The study included consultation with officers in GreenCare, Development Control, Highways Maintenance and Dudley Property Consultancy. The study considered the proposal to provide the following;
- A *Picea omorika* (Serbian spruce) tree with a height of 5-6 metres at planting
 - Surfacing of the perimeter of the planter with a 'breathable' resin bound gravel. This will prevent the topsoil from becoming compacted if walked on
 - A permanent electrical supply for Christmas lights
 - Ground fixings for and provision of temporary protective fencing (for health and safety purposes) for when the Christmas lights are in operation
 - A signboard guiding visitors to facilities in the town centre and acknowledging the support of Sandvik UK
 - Perimeter seating around the planter
- 2.4 The study concluded that the proposed location would be suitable and that there would appear to be no technical reasons why the proposal could not go ahead. The proposals are estimated to cost £17,000.
- 2.5 Particular attention has been paid by officers to the need to avoid obscuring lines of sight from the CCTV cameras in the town centre. By locating the proposed tree slightly off centre and by implementing minor modifications to the CCTV column adjacent to Hagley Road it is considered that there will be no adverse effect on the operation of the CCTV.
- 2.6 The planter currently contains over mature shrub planting and 2 trees, a birch and a cherry. If the proposal were to proceed then these 2 trees would need to be removed. The Council's Arboriculture Officer has inspected these trees and advised that whereas they are not in an unhealthy or unsafe condition, they are also not in such a good condition that they should prevent this proposal from going ahead. It is therefore proposed that, on balance, the environmental improvement resulting from this proposal outweighs their removal.

2.7 The Chairman of this Committee and the Head of Design and Projects met with the Corporate Marketing Manager of Sandvik UK on the 4th June 2004 to discuss the proposals. Sandvik UK have subsequently made an offer of funding to support the implementation of the proposals.

2.8 Subject to the views of members of this Committee, it is proposed to implement the proposals in time for the Christmas lights switch on in November 2004.

2.9 If implemented, the proposals would complement recent improvements to the environment of the town centre, including the creation of Somers Square, the removal of redundant brick planters, and the provision of seating and bins.

3.0 PROPOSAL

3.1 It is proposed that the Committee support the proposals for the provision of a permanent Christmas tree in Halesowen Town Centre.

4.0 FINANCE

4.1 The costs of the permanent Christmas tree in Halesowen Town Centre are to be met by a contribution from Sandvik and the Town Centre Regeneration capital budget.

5.0 LAW

5.1 Under Part I of the Local Government Act 2000 the Council may do anything which it thinks is likely to achieve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of its area.

5.2 Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything that is calculated to facilitate or is conducive to or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

6.1 The proposals in this report accord with the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 That the proposal set out in paragraph 3.1 of this report be approved.

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Director of the Urban Environment - John B. Millar

Contact Officer: Rupert Dugdale ext 5538

Background documents used in the preparation of this report:-

- 1 Feasibility study for the provision of permanent Christmas tree in Halesowen Town Centre – Nicol Jones & Lomax (Landscape Architects)