
Halesowen Area Committee – 6th July 2011

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Halesowen Town Centre Development

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Committee on progress with regard to physical developments taking place in and around Halesowen Town Centre, with particular regard to the Halesowen Area Action Plan

Background

2. Since the meeting of this Committee on the 14th March 2007, Members have received regular progress reports on Town Centre development and management activity. It is proposed in future to focus such reports with more detail on particular themes or work programmes, starting with the Halesowen Area Action Plan (AAP)
3. The AAP will form part of Dudley Borough's wider 'Local Development Framework'. It will provide a vision for what we want to achieve in the Town Centre by 2026, and through its policies and site allocations, it will set out how that vision will be delivered. It will also update and replace the Halesowen Town Centre chapter of the Council's Unitary Development Plan which is now out of date and has been superseded by the adopted Joint Core Strategy for the Black Country (JCS).
4. The AAP will therefore be a planning policy document against which decisions on planning applications will be made for the period 2012 to 2026. It will consider such issues as:
 - Which areas need regenerating, and which need to be conserved.
 - What new development is needed and where this should happen.
 - Where the retail core of the Town Centre is, thereby guiding retail and non-retail development to appropriate locations.
 - Whether any new or enhanced infrastructure is needed to service the Town Centre, such as public spaces, streets or green infrastructure.
 - What principles should guide new development, particularly in terms of urban design.
5. The AAP will need to conform with and deliver the requirements of the JCS for the Black Country. This strategic document highlights Brierley Hill as the strategic centre for Dudley Borough, and identifies Halesowen as a more locally focussed town centre which will perform an important role in day to day shopping and other town centre related activity. The Joint Core Strategy contains a number of spatial objectives including requirements for 'a network of vibrant and attractive town, district and local centres', and 'a high quality environment'.

6. The Area Action Plan is now at an advanced stage. Following on from and informed by earlier stage information gathering, the AAP options document, produced last Summer, set out a vision and set of objectives for the town centre – there being an objective for each of the following themes:

- Regeneration
- Land Use
- Public Realm
- Nature Conservation
- Historic Conservation
- Transport
- Urban Design

7. Under these themes, a variety of Halesowen town centre issues were identified, together with some preferred (and where appropriate alternative) options and or proposed policies in terms of how these issues may best be resolved.

8. The planning process requires that the community and other stakeholders are engaged in the preparation of development plan documents such as area action plans – hence the need for the ‘Options’ stage document and its subsequent formal public consultation period between July 30th to September 10th 2010. This Committee received a report on the consultation and its findings at its meeting on the 10th November 2010, which in summary showed a quantity of support for:

- The proposed Vision and Objectives – with comments that the objectives could be strengthened from an environment perspective;
- That A1 Retail land use/development continue to be focussed within the Primary Shopping Area (retail core);
- Improving and adding to the evening and night-time economy (though not adding to the younger adult drinking culture);
- That any new development close to the River Stour should enhance the river, improve access to and along it, and guard against flood risk;
- Protecting and improving wildlife habitats and the network of green spaces;
- Improving the quality (and, where appropriate, quantity) of the public realm – streets, paved and green open spaces, trees and landscaping, street furniture, signage, art, etc;
- A return towards pre-1960s town character – finer grain, narrower scale and character of frontages (but avoiding pastiche, making sympathetic use of new design ideas and materials, and respecting the past while embracing contemporary development);
- That new development should be of high quality and should improve Halesowen town centre’s character, image and safety (including that good design should be sustainable and consider energy sources/consumption and water use/drainage);
- Improving pedestrian connectivity between St John’s church and the town centre, and better incorporating the church into the town (including by using the church for civic, community and cultural uses, and by including St John’s church within the town centre boundary).

9. The results of this consultation alongside further work, discussions with businesses, landowners and the community and further detailed evidence gathering to formulate a firmed up plan setting out draft policies, will be prepared into a ‘Preferred Options’ document which will be published this Autumn.

10. Policy areas and issues in the AAP include:

- surface water and flood related issues and responsibilities
- regeneration projects and any potential redevelopment proposals
- transport and access issues
- progressing the Halesowen Historic Landscape Characterisation for the town centre and its surrounds
- Urban Design issues

11. In terms of the various potential development opportunity sites identified in last year's options stage document, it was decided that further supporting evidence was required in order to take these sites forward. Owners and leaseholders of these sites were consulted during April 2011 and were asked to comment as to the AAP 'Options' stage document and in terms of their future intentions or aspirations for their land or premises within Halesowen Town Centre. A reasonable level of consultation response was received, including that:

- There is little demand for office land use, such that change of use or redevelopment towards alternative town centre land uses should be encouraged.
- Existing levels of public car parking provision in the town centre should be maintained.

12. The AAP Project Group is now preparing draft chapters for the draft Preferred Options document which are proposed to include:

- Land Use
- Development Opportunity Sites
- Landscape and Public Realm
- Nature Conservation
- Historic Environment
- Urban Design

13. The timetable for the completion of the AAP is as below:

- Preferred Options document presented to Cabinet - September 2011
- Public consultation on Preferred Options – October/November 2011
- Publication of draft AAP and presentation to Cabinet & Council - June 2012
- Public consultation on draft AAP – July/August 2012
- Submission of draft AAP to Secretary of State - September 2012
- Examination in Public - February 2013
- Inspectors Report anticipated - May 2013
- Adoption - Cabinet & Council in July 2013

14. The Town Centres Working Group of this Committee has been and will continue to be actively involved in the to preparation of the AAP

Finance

12. The Halesowen Area Action Plan will be funded from existing budgets and resources dedicated to the production of Development Plan Documents and other such statutory planning documents.

Law

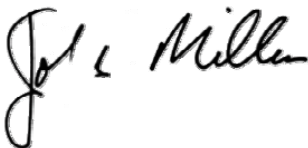
13. The production of the Halesowen Area Action Plan is necessary in order to update and replace the Halesowen chapter of the Dudley Unitary Development Plan (UDP) – the UDP having a plan period to the end of 2011.
14. This Area Action Plan for Halesowen will deliver those regeneration requirements for the town as set out in the emerging Black Country Joint Core Strategy. This Area Action Plan is a Development Plan Document and has to be produced in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004 as amended by the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008.
15. In addition Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 allows the Council to do anything that it considers is likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area.

Equality Impact

16. The Halesowen Area Action Plan will set the planning framework for the development of Halesowen up to 2026. The Area Action Plan will seek to ensure that sufficient homes, shops and employment, social, educational and recreational facilities are planned and provided for in that time to meet the needs of the communities in the area. This will include meeting the needs of children and young people by seeking to provide sufficient facilities for them as well as having a positive effect for future generations.

Recommendation

17. That the Committee;
 - notes the progress of the Halesowen Area Action Plan
 - receives further reports on the preparation of the Halesowen Area Action Plan and on the outcome of further consultation exercises carried out as part of its preparation



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List of Background Papers

Halesowen Area Action Plan (AAP) Options document – available in Members Room
Black Country Joint Core Strategy <http://blackcountrycorestrategy.dudley.gov.uk/>