

**Halesowen Area Committee – 22nd March 2006**

**Joint report of the Director of the Urban Environment and the Halesowen Area Liaison Officer**

**HALESOWEN TOWN CENTRE – TRANSPORT AND REGENERATION ISSUES**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To advise the Committee of the measures being taken to address concerns relating to traffic and regeneration issues in Halesowen Town Centre.

**Background**

2. Members, residents and businesses in Halesowen have recently expressed concern at the short term impact of the significant regeneration activities underway in the town centre, and in respect of associated transportation issues.
3. Halesowen's development into its status as one of the Borough's 4 principal town centres has created a difficult challenge for the Council and those wishing to invest in significant development opportunities. The town centre occupies a constrained site limited by topography and by the planning policies which seek to protect its retail core, the result of which is that there is very limited scope for the development of underused or vacant land. As a consequence, any significant development will inevitably have a short term impact on existing activities in the town centre. It is against this background of a constrained town centre that Officers recognise that the developments referred to in this report will inevitably be associated with short term inconvenience and disruption to the town centre, but which will be offset against significant longer term benefits. Officers are accordingly making every effort in liaison with town centre stakeholders and developers to minimise the disruption
4. This report will address issues associated with the major opportunities offered by the redevelopment of the Cornbow Centre and the bus station, and the steps being taken in respect of transportation issues in and around the town centre

## Regeneration Issues

- 5 The proposals by Vale Retail, for which planning permission was granted on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 2005, offer significant opportunities for the town centre. These may be summarised as follows;
  - 6,970 m<sup>2</sup> (approximately 75,000 sq ft) of retail floorspace – an increase of 3,528 m<sup>2</sup> (just under 38,000 sq ft) including a new Asda supermarket
  - a new 588-space multi-storey car park – an increase of 188 spaces
  - creation of between 300 and 400 full-time and part-time jobs for local people
  - strengthening the town centre retail offer, re-using underused and vacant land within the town centre;
  - Accessibility will be significantly improved, especially for disabled people through the provision of improved lifts, new travelators, and 42 parking spaces are being provided for disabled users;
  - Removal of the unsightly existing multi storey car park and former Murco garage site
  - Provision of a much improved environment at a significant 'gateway' to the town centre
- 6 Prior to the development commencing a Compulsory Purchase Order needs to be served and a Section 106 agreement signed between Vale Retail and the Council
- 7 After the serving of the Compulsory Purchase Order there will be a 6 week period for objections. If any objections cannot be resolved then a public inquiry will be convened, which may be expected to take 6 months prior to a decision being made.
- 8 The Section 106 agreement requires the following to be provided by Vale Retail;
  - The designation of suitably located long stay spaces for short stay for the duration of the works.
  - Additional public signage be provided to improve utilisation of the spaces available.
  - Additional security for the duration of the works at some of the more remote car park spaces currently unpopular with the public.
  - By way of reimbursement of lost revenue, the suspension of parking charges over an extended period at extraordinary peak times over and above that which currently occurs over periods up to Christmas and around bank holidays.
  - The terms of the operation of the multi-storey car park, which forms part of the approved development;
  - Addressing the impact of the development on the operation of the roundabout at the junction between High Street and Stourbridge Road/ New Road by providing and implementing at his own cost highway improvement works to mitigate the impact of the development.

### **Former Safeway supermarket**

- 9 Concern has been expressed, following the departure of Safeway, at the risk that the Town Centre will not have a supermarket until the opening of the new Asda in the Cornbow Centre in 2007. However, the Kwiksave supermarket in the Cornbow Centre is currently undergoing a refurbishment and rebranding as a Somerfield supermarket prior to reopening on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2006
- 10 In addition, whereas it must be recognised that the Council has limited opportunities, Officers have made extensive enquiries with both supermarket operators and their agents to find an alternative operator to take over the former Safeway premises. These enquiries are ongoing and Officers are hopeful that a suitable operator may be found

### **Transportation Issues**

- 11 In order to address issues relating to traffic congestion and Town Centre access it is proposed to undertake a Town Centre Access Study. This will consider a wide range of traffic and transportation issues and to identify solutions to problems experienced by all modes of transport.
- 12 Some of the problems of congestion on the network, particularly in Queensway, are exacerbated because of delays some distance away, notably at The Grange island and the A456 Manor Way. These problem areas will also be considered as part of the study.
- 13 The study will also include, in close consultation with CENTRO and Travel West Midlands, consideration of the best use of the existing bus lanes in the town centre with a view to optimising the use of available road space.
- 14 It is also intended that the traffic difficulties in the High Street, particularly around the frontage of St. John's Church, will be considered in some detail.
- 15 Preparatory work on establishing up-to-date traffic baseline conditions has already commenced, with a comprehensive set of traffic surveys in and around the town centre already being underway
- 16 Highway modifications in Queensway are proposed as enabling works for the redevelopment and expansion of the Bus Station, and also to assist future highway developments. These proposals already have the support of this Committee. Site commencement of these works is dependant on
  - (a) the completion of a Section 106 Agreement
  - (b) the statutory timescales associated with the legal processes required, including stopping up of highways orders
- 17 Officers are working closely with CENTRO to ensure that the above processes may be completed in the shortest possible time that the statutory processes will allow

- 18 The traffic study will consider a wide range of issues such as:-
- Access to the Cornbow Centre for all traffic modes, including, delivery and servicing vehicles, public transport/bus lanes, pedestrians and cyclists.
  - The best routes to promote for through traffic to minimise its impact on the Town Centre
  - The availability, location of, and access to, public car parking.
- 19 Work is ongoing on the development of a borough wide parking strategy. As part of the Local Development Framework process it is intended that a Supplementary Planning Document will be submitted providing guidance upon the level of car parking that should be provided alongside new developments. This will be subject to consultation in the near future.
- 20 Consultation to establish perceived and actual problems will form an early part of the process, prior to the selection of a preferred option.
- 21 More detailed consideration could then be given to the phased implementation of recommended transportation strategies

### **Halesowen Bus Station**

- 22 The proposed improvements to the Bus Station respond to both the Cornbow Centre development plans to expand out into the existing Bus Station, and also the need to accommodate an increased number of bus stands, layover/service vehicle parking and improved messaging provision
- 23 Improvements will be provided for passenger waiting and staff accommodation. The proposals to increase the Bus Station's facilities are as a direct result of increasing customer and service demands.
- 24 Other resources for bus users and shoppers will include the introduction of pedestrian crossings in the area.
- 25 The planning application for the bus station was approved subject to conditions by the Development Control Committee on the 28th February 2006

### **Traffic Regulation Orders**

- 26 To complement the introduction of the improved Bus Station, traffic management measures are proposed. These will include a lower (20 mph) speed limit, a section of no-right-turn traffic flow from Queensway into Church Croft, and other traffic regulations.

### **Sustainable Transport**

- 27 Measures to improve bus services and traffic movements for users of Halesowen Town Centre comply with current policies regarding sustainability.

## **Car parking**

- 28 Members may be aware that the Council is currently reviewing its car parking charges. It is proposed to introduce a new payment structure which will allow for 1, 2 and 3 hour periods. Concerns have been expressed by visitors to the town centre at the lack of short term parking provision and it is anticipated that this proposal will assist in addressing these concerns.

## **Public Consultation**

- 29 There are a wide range of issues identified in this report, where consultation with the public, town centre traders and others would be appropriate.
- 30 The Area Committee's previously earmarked a total of £25,000 from its Delegated Capital Budget for Town Centre Enhancements, although none of this has yet been committed to specific projects, pending the developments considered in this report. Proposals will need to be worked up in due course, where, again, it would be appropriate to undertake public consultation.
- 31 At its meeting on 16th November, in the context of the future role of the Cradley Forum, it was suggested that the Halesowen Forum should be reinstated and the Area Liaison Officer was requested to report back.
- 32 Given that, and the need for public consultation on Town Centre issues, the Area Liaison Officer suggests that it would be appropriate to convene a meeting of interested parties and people "to provide an opportunity for consultation with the public, town centre traders and others, on the issues affecting the development of Halesowen Town Centre, including the preparation of an Area Action Plan and Traffic Study and the allocation of Area Committee funds previously earmarked for Town Centre Enhancements."

## **Finance**

- 33 The Section 106 agreement with Vale Retail provides for the provision of a range of Highway and Car Parking issues. Certain Pedestrian Crossing Facilities and Traffic Regulation Orders can be financed from the Council's Highway Capital Budget.
- 34 The Area Committee has previously earmarked a total of £25,000 from its Delegated Capital Budget for Town Centre Enhancements

## **Law**

- 35 Traffic Regulation Orders are made under powers contained in Section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, subject to regulations laid down by the Secretary of State.
- 36 The Council is empowered to improve highways under Section 62 of the Highways Act 1980.

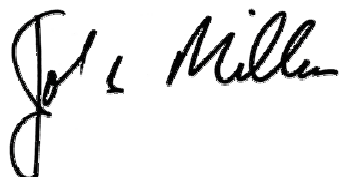
- 37 Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, its statutory functions.
- 38 New development is subject to the planning control provisions in the Town & Country Planning Act 1990, as amended

### **Equality Impact**

- 39 Pedestrian crossing facilities and footways adjacent to the public carriageway assist mobility impaired persons, pedestrians and other vulnerable highway users.
- 40 Town Centre regeneration initiatives offer the opportunity to engage all sectors of the community, including children and young people, in the preparation of proposals. Regeneration initiatives, such as those offered by the redevelopment of the Cornbow Centre, also provide for increased accessibility in town centre

### **Recommendation**

- 41 That the Committee notes and supports the contents of this report.
- 42 That the Committee note the position with the former Safeway supermarket
- 43 That the Committee asks officers to make arrangements for a consultation meeting on developments in the Town Centre.



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