

Halesowen Area Committee- 10th March 2010

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Halesowen Town Centre Development

Purpose of the Report

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

Background

2. At the 14th 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. The Town Centre Working Group of Members and Officers last met on the 18th February 2010 to consider issues affecting the regeneration of the Town Centre.

Regeneration and Planning Issues

Halesowen In Bloom/Environmental Improvements

3. The Halesowen Town Centre Working Group has overseen the preparation of an Action Plan for environmental improvements, the content of which has been reported to this Committee on a number of occasions. The Action Plan includes improvements to public realm in and around the town centre, a pilot exercise for a 'Halesowen in Bloom' initiative, and a series of events with an environmental theme and is divided into short, medium and long term projects. The first of the 'early wins' underway are improvements to the Husky Dog island which, following the approval of the Working Group on the 4th February 2010, will use the £17,000 which the Committee has allocated for town centre environmental improvements from its delegated capital budget. This work is due to be complete by the end of March 2010. 2 Information signs at key entry points to the town centre will shortly be installed to provide information for shoppers, tourists and visitors, as will the replacement of the finger post in Fingerpost Gardens
4. The partnership approach to developing the "Halesowen in Bloom" initiative is continuing with partners from Sandvik, Asda, Vale Retail, Halesowen College and the Chamber of Commerce and attention is currently being focussed on securing financial resources for the project. Applications for grant funding are currently in preparation for

a number of external funders, and letters inviting support from local businesses and community groups have been sent out. In addition, a press release has been issued seeking contributions and support for the In Bloom initiative from Halesowen residents, following a suggestion by a member of the public at this Committee on the 14th January 2010.

Halesowen Area Action Plan

5. Work on the Halesowen Area Action Plan has commenced. It will be a policy document against which decisions on planning applications will be made for the period 2012 to 2026. The Area Action Plan will effectively update the 'Halesowen' chapter of the Dudley Unitary Development Plan. The Council is required to go through a specific process, set by legislation, to prepare the document:
 - Early engagement with key stakeholders - 11th February to 11th March 2010
 - Public consultation on 'Options' for the Halesowen Area Action Plan - commencing towards the end of June 2010 for 6 weeks
 - Publication of the Halesowen Area Action Plan for public consultation - January 2011
 - Submission of the Halesowen Area Action Plan to the Secretary of State - June 2011
 - Examination of the Halesowen Area Action Plan by a Government Inspector - October 2011
 - Publication of the Inspectors Report - March 2012
 - Adoption of the Halesowen Area Action Plan - July 2012
6. The Area Committee will receive regular reports on the development of this document during the preparation of the Area Action Plan.

Town Centre Management Issues

7. Since the last report on this subject to the Area Committee on the 14th January 2009 the Town Centre Management service has carried out the following:
8. Following the selection by the Committee of the design for a Flag for Halesowen submitted by Halesowen College student Reece O`Toole, the production of the flag by a local firm has been ordered, and a flag raising ceremony is currently being arranged.
9. As part of a current review into the way that the Council delivers its Town Centre Management service, a Capacity building workshop was held on the 21st January 2010. The workshop provided an opportunity for traders, partners and agencies to have a say on their aspirations for Halesowen, and the future direction of the town centre management services, and will inform the results of this review which are due to report in June 2010.

Proposed events:

10. 24th April 2010 will see the St Georges Day Celebrations being held in Halesowen and work is currently underway to organise this event.

Transportation issues

Earls Way Island

11. Work is being carried out on the installation of toucan crossings to the east of the Earls Way roundabout (New Road and Earls Way) and construction of a new footpath and tarmac area on the central reserve to link the two crossings. The start of works was delayed by one week due to adverse weather conditions and work started on 18th January 2010. Currently work is progressing to programme and at the date of preparation of this report was due to complete by the 19th February 2010

Grange Island

12. Members will remember the proposals presented at previous Committees to provide public art to the recently completed Grange Island. Funding is currently available for either the first phase of these proposals, being a colourful resin bound glass finish, or for the provision of additional pedestrian crossings at the island. In order to measure the demand for additional pedestrian crossings, a full 12 hour pedestrian survey was carried out at the junction on Thursday 11th February 2010. As a result of this it appears that the level of pedestrian demand has not significantly changed and, given recent concerns expressed regarding the capacity of the roundabout, it is suggested that the signalised crossings should not be implemented at this time unless at some future date it is shown that pedestrian demand has increased significantly. However, it is noted that the next pedestrian survey should take place at a comparable time of year to the 2008 pedestrian survey.
13. It should be noted that the scheme that has been implemented at Grange Island is a safety scheme, with the primary objective of reducing injury accidents, so the accident situation will be closely monitored. It will be necessary to continue this monitoring for at least 3 years which is the time period over which schemes are normally assessed.
14. As a result of the above, it is proposed to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Transportation to approve the installation of the resin bound glass finish public art to the island using the funding that is currently available

Bus Service Review

15. Members will be aware of the increasing number of changes to bus service routes within the Halesowen area. In recent months, the number of changes both past and proposed that are being undertaken by bus companies has reached a level where concern is expressed. An important consideration for regeneration activity is to ensure that bus routes serve our major and local centres including Halesowen Town Centre. It is important that local communities enjoy access through service provision to local centres that this is maintained and where possible enhanced. Accordingly, it is suggested that a bus service review is undertaken in co-operation with service providers as a matter of some urgency.

Finance

16. There are currently limited resources available for public realm developments which could contribute to an 'in Bloom' initiative. All other activities and developments detailed within this reported are funded from resources held by the Directorate of the Urban Environment.
17. A partnership approach is being developed in order to potentially fund a Halesowen in Bloom initiative which will be supported by external funding.

Law

18. 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.

Equality Impact

19. The proposal contained within this report complies with the Councils equal opportunities policy.
20. A principal role of the Directorate of the Urban Environment is to encourage regeneration which will impact on all sectors of the community, including the needs of children and young people.

Recommendation

21. That the Committee notes the progress of development in Halesowen Town Centre.
22. That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be requested to endorse an application to bus service providers to review bus services within the Halesowen area.
23. That the Cabinet Member for Transportation be requested to approve the installation of resin bound glass finish public art to Grange Island using the funding that is currently available



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List of Background Papers

None