

Halesowen Area Committee – 7th July 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 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, which has been charged with the remit of overseeing physical development in the Town Centre, last met on the 21st April 2010

Transport issues

3. Bus Service Review. Following the recent concerns raised at Halesowen Area Committee regarding accessibility via bus into the Town Centre, investigations have been undertaken to assess the situation. In summary the findings of these investigations were that generally Halesowen is well serviced in terms of bus routes. However, due to service withdrawals and changes some small residential pockets now have increased distances to travel to access the nearest bus stop. These findings have been forwarded to Centro and we are awaiting a response.

Regeneration and Planning Issues

4. Work is continuing on the Action Plan for environmental improvements for the Town Centre which has been presented to the Committee on a number of previous occasions. Particular focus has been given in the first and pilot year for 'Halesowen in Bloom' on seeking financial support from business, external grant sources and the community, to add to the investment in environmental improvements already committed by the Council, Sandvik Coromat UK and Halesowen Chamber of Commerce.
5. A letter and flyer has been sent to 340 businesses and potential sponsors in Halesowen seeking support for the Halesowen In Bloom initiative. A number of businesses have made a positive response to this approach

6. Letters inviting support (either financial or in kind) have been sent to a wide range of community, social and voluntary groups and schools in the Halesowen area, and again, a number of positive responses have been received.
7. A press release and photo opportunity took place in mid – April in order to seek support from residents, community organisations and businesses not covered by the above mailing. This has resulted in offers of support (both financial and ‘in kind’) from members of the public, Tenterfields Children Centre, Halesowen Garden Club, Halesowen Flower Club, local schools, allotment holders, the Zion Christian Centre, The Friends of The Leasowes and the Hope Centre.
8. As a result of the continuing sponsorship by Sandvik Coromat and the Halesowen Chamber of Trade, Town Centre floral displays were installed in the first week of June. In addition, the approaches referred to in paragraphs 5 to 7 above have resulted in additional sponsorship from Vale Retail, Tenterfields Childrens Centre, Halesowen Town Guild, Zion Christian Centre and BB Price, which has allowed the reintroduction of summer and spring bedding on the verge adjacent to St Johns Church and additional planters in the town centre. The completion of these additional displays is due by the end of June.
9. A key element of this project and one which it is considered essential to secure external funding is to maximise the training and community engagement element of the Halesowen In Bloom scheme. We have been developing proposals for this with the Council’s training organisation, Future Skills Dudley, who have extensive experience of delivering horticultural and construction training which is matched with a good track record of getting trainees into employment. In addition this has opened up opportunities for seeking training places with companies with whom Future Skills Dudley are already working.
10. The partnership approach to developing the Halesowen in Bloom initiative is continuing with partners from Sandvik Coromat, Asda, Vale Retail, Halesowen College, Halesowen Chamber of Trade and Dudley MIND. Currently attention is being focused on attracting external funding and to date 6 expressions of interest and 5 full funding applications have been submitted to external funding organisations. Work is continuing with the preparation and submission of applications to other sources of external funding. At present the funding bids are focussing on the following projects;
 - Town Centre floral displays and environmental enhancements as a training initiative through Halesowen In Bloom
 - The development of a ‘pocket park’, with planting, seating and public, on the open space adjacent to Birmingham Street
 - A public art mosaic project, possibly incorporating the recent Halesowen flag
11. Continued liaison is underway with the Environment Agency, firstly in respect of any permissions required for work in the vicinity of the Stour, and also to develop their support for habitat/access improvements along the river.

Installation of welcome/information for shoppers & visitors

12. Officers are currently working with Centro on the location of new welcome and information signage at the Bus St and work is continuing to seek the installation of the second sign at the top of the High Street

Replace the Fingerpost in the Finger Post Garden

13. The replacement fingerpost sign has been delivered and is due to be installed by the end of June after which an unveiling ceremony will be arranged

Husky Dog Island

14. The landscape contract has been awarded for the environmental improvements to Husky Dog Island, which started on May 24th and is due to be completed by June 14th 2010

Town Centre Management Issues

15. The successful St George's day event on the 24th April was attended by over 2000 visitors, who enjoyed a full day of entertainment in perfect spring weather. The event started at 10.30 am with the annual parade led by members of the town's Royal British Legion. Ex –servicemen and women marched from Hagley Road along the Queensway and past St John the Baptist Church before coming to a halt at Somers Square where a stage area had been set up. Other events included an exhibition of silver and a medieval encampment at St John the Baptist Church, a bouncy castle, jugglers, stilt walkers, other street entertainers and a tea dance at the Cornbow Hall.
16. Members may be aware that it has been necessary to restructure the Council's Town Centre Management function following approval by Council on the 3rd March 2010 of budget reductions in the current and future financial years, which has reduced the number of Town Centre Managers from 4 to 3. This restructure has now been completed, as a result of which the former Town Centre Manager for Halesowen now has responsibility for both Halesowen and Brierley Hill. In addition, the former Town Centre Manager for Stourbridge is now responsible for Town Centre events, marketing, promotion and the priority local centres in the Borough. This allocation of duties is an interim position pending the outcome of a current review of the Council's Town Centre management service

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.

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.

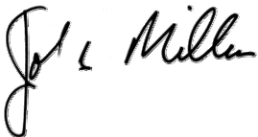
19. The Council is empowered to improve Highways under section 62 of the Highways Act 1980. Traffic Regulation orders are made under powers contained in section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The traffic calming Act 1992 amends the Highways Act 1980 to allow works to be carried out to promote 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

20. A principal role of the Directorate of the Urban Environment is to encourage inclusivity amongst all sectors of the community, including the needs of children and young people. The Combow 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

1. That the Committee notes the progress of development in Halesowen Town Centre



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