

Halesowen Area Committee – 9th September 2010

Report of the Director of the Urban Environment

Cradley/Windmill Hill Local Centre Regeneration Plan

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Committee on progress in delivering the Cradley/Windmill Hill Local Centre Regeneration Plan.

Background

2. Cradley/Windmill Hill Local Centre was identified as 1 of the 5 priority district and local centres for regeneration in the 2005 'Local and District Centres Review' approved by Cabinet in 2006. This Review measured the performance of each of the 16 district and local centres against set criteria. The 5 priority centres identified in the Review were Shell Corner, Cradley/Windmill Hill, Pensnett, Lye and Quarry Bank.
3. The Council's intention was to develop Regeneration Strategies for the priority centres to guide the renewal of these areas. Due to the urgency in starting the regeneration process in these areas, it was decided that these Regeneration Strategies would be Council approved documents and not formal plans through the statutory Local Development Framework because this would have entailed a lengthy approval process.
4. The Cradley/Windmill Hill Local Centre Regeneration Plan was subject to an extensive consultation process with the local community and partner organisations and was approved by Cabinet in September 2007.
5. The Cradley Working Group was formed to oversee the implementation of the Cradley/Windmill Hill Regeneration Plan. The Working Group was approved by the Halesowen Area Committee on 12th March 2008 and was reconvened by this Area Committee on the 7th July 2010.
6. It should be recognised that the production of a Regeneration Plan will in itself not create development activity or the funding to drive it. It will however provide a framework to guide appropriate investment where resources exist. To that end, all of the actions proposed in the Regeneration Plan are entirely reliant on the availability of private and public sector funding for them to proceed.
7. With respect to private sector funding, the recession has had an inevitable and significant impact on development activity in all of the borough's centres. As a result, development reliant on private sector investment anticipated in adopted Regeneration Strategies has in a number of cases been delayed or cancelled.

8. Even during the times when the private sector was more willing to invest in development, local centres have not been able to attract the levels of investment that has happened in larger centres. Therefore in the current climate securing investment is even more of a challenge. The problems and issues of the local centres are ingrained and the sites difficult; were this not the case they would have been addressed by market forces by now and there would be no need for Regeneration Strategies. Many of the sites considered for development have low value and require high investment to solve long standing issues thereby giving poor or no return to the investor.
9. Despite the above, there will be future willingness for private sector investment in the local centre when there is greater access to funding and returns to investors improve, and strenuous efforts are being made to seek out potential developers who are prepared to carry out work either now or when market conditions improve. Liason has taken place and is continuing with a number of landowners and developers who have expressed positive interest in carrying out development work. Members will be aware that due to commercial sensitivities, details of these may not be made public due to the adverse effect that this may have on proposals proceeding.
10. Turning to public sector funding, the Council has for a number of years held funding for capital improvements to its Local Centres, and projects in the Cradley Local Centre have benefited from this funding in previous years. The disposal of Council owned land at Foredraft Street will generate capital receipts for the Council which will support the improvements to and adoption of Foredraft Street, and it is anticipated that any planning permission for the development of this site would in turn create, via planning obligations/Section 106 receipts, funding which could be used to support a number of improvements in the Centre. Whereas the Centre falls outside of the strategic priorities for the Regional Development Agency, Advantage West Midlands, and therefore has not been able to benefit from investment from this source, it remains a strategic priority for the Primary care Trust, NHS Dudley, for the provision of a LIFT healthcare centre. Planning obligations/Section 106 receipts for open space and public realm improvements which may be spent in the Centre are being received and pooled so that improvements identified in the Regeneration Strategy may be delivered once there are sufficient amounts to do so, and again, the quantum of these will increase when market conditions allow more development activity
11. The actions identified in the Cradley/Windmill Hill Local Centre Regeneration Plan are phased into short-term options (1-2 years), medium term options (2-5 years) and long-term options (6-10 years). The action plan, and status on its implementation, is listed in Appendix A to this report, however, the Committee's attention is drawn to the following
 - *Foredraft Street Development Site*- A development brief for this site was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration on the 19th May 2010, following extensive local consultation. The site will now be marketed for residential development.
 - *LIFT Scheme*-- NHS Dudley have identified Cradley as a location for a LIFT healthcare development and their developer partner (Dudley Infracare LIFT) had been in discussions with the Council and the Providence Methodist Church about the possibility of redeveloping this site. However, this site's constraints are such that it is not considered suitable by LIFT for such a

proposal. However NHS Dudley remains committed to locating a scheme in the Cradley/Windmill Hill area and a number of other sites in the Centre are currently being assessed for suitability and deliverability.

- *Providence Methodist Church Site* - Discussions are continuing with the Methodist Church regarding a number of options for a residential based redevelopment of their site.
- *118-122 Windmill Hill Development Site* - The Council is in ongoing discussions with a developer who is interested in redeveloping the site identified as 118-122 in the Regeneration Plan for retail led mixed use scheme.
- *120 – 128 Colley Gate (Vacant Shops)* – A number of complaints have been received by the Council in respect of the condition of these properties, and following contact by Officers with landowners some improvements have been carried out and are proposed. None of the properties are in such a condition that would permit the Council to use its statutory powers to seek improvements. The Council has been asked on a number of occasions by residents whether it would be possible to use to Compulsory Purchase Order powers to acquire these, or other properties, in the Centre in order to carry out development or improvements. The Council has in the past used its Compulsory Purchase Order powers to assist development, but to do so would need to sound planning justification, and the costs associated with this would need to be borne by a development partner.
- *Implementing highway and public realm improvements* - Funding was secured (£30,000) from the Council's Capital Programme to undertake a number of improvements identified in the Regeneration Plan. These included upgrading the pedestrian footpath linking Windmill Hill to land at Foredraft Street, creating Gateways to the local centre and upgrading signage/road markings. This work was completed in 2009.

12. A question was raised at the meeting of this Committee on the 7th July 2010 with respect to air quality issues associate with vehicle emissions in the Centre. Given current volumes of traffic it is considered that levels of congestion, and therefore vehicle emissions, are only likely to reduce through improvements to junctions. These improvements are constrained by land ownership and availability of funding, however, officers are actively seeking funding as part of the Smart Routes initiative.

Finance

13. 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 need to be funded either by existing capital or revenue budgets held within Economic Regeneration Division, or through securing additional external funding such as from private sector developers or government agencies.

Law

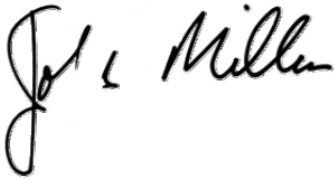
14. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 enables the Council to do anything which it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental well being of its area.

Equality Impact

15. 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. The Cradley Regeneration Plan will seek to regenerate the local centre for adults, children and young people alike, hence promoting equal opportunities for all.

Recommendation

16. It is recommended that the Committee notes the progress of regeneration work in Cradley/Windmill Hill local centre.



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List of Background Papers

1. Centres and Retail – District and Local Centres Review February 2006
2. Cradley/Windmill Hill local Centre Regeneration Plan July 2007

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APPENDIX A – Progress on implementation of the Implementation Plan

Short term Actions (1-2 years; 2007/9)

Action		Status
Improvements to footways and streetscape	✓	<i>Works carried out in 2009 using Capital programme funding</i>
Improvements to pedestrian links to the town centre from the surrounding residential areas.	✓	<i>Works carried out in 2009 using Capital programme funding</i>
Provision of cycle parking in the local centre		<i>Order placed for cycle parking August 2010</i>
Review local bus services and customer needs in consultation with TWM	✓	<i>A borough wide bus review was implemented in April 2008</i>
Redesign of bus stop/layby adjacent to nos. 28 to 40 Windmill Hill.	✓	<i>Measures investigated but rejected on safety grounds</i>
Provision of loading facilities for shops at top of Windmill Hill	✓	<i>Proposals investigated but rejected following public consultation</i>
Exploration of possible options or designs for visual gateway treatments at each end of Windmill Hill in the vicinity of the existing signalised crossing facilities	✓	<i>Works carried out in 2009 using Capital programme funding</i>
Short term measures to improve Toys Lane junction	✓	<i>Measures investigated but rejected on safety grounds</i>
Short term improvements to the existing public car parks	✓	<i>Works carried out in 2009 using Capital programme funding</i>

Medium term Actions (2 - 5 years; 2009/12)

Action		Status
Possible development at Sites 1,2 and 3		<i>Extensive liaison has taken place with Dudley Infracare LiftCo, Methodist Church, landowners and potential developers to bring development forward; Development Brief completed for Foredraft Street and land is being brought forward for development</i>
New key public space on open space adjacent to Methodist Church		<i>Section 106 Open Space and Public Realm funds are being pooled for future use on this area</i>
Introduction of small public spaces with seating and public art along Windmill Hill		<i>Section 106 Open Space and Public Realm funds are being pooled for future use on this area</i>
Shop front improvements particularly at protected frontages and run down properties		<i>Opportunities exist for improvements via the Council's Empty Shopfronts Grant scheme</i>
Improvements to public space associated with rights of way footpath		<i>Section 106 Open Space and Public Realm funds are being pooled for future use on this area</i>
Improvements to the approved circular cycle route and links to the centre		<i>Funding to be identified before this can be progressed</i>

Zebra or puffin controlled crossing on Windmill Hill opposite Methodist Church	✓	<i>Proposals rejected following public consultation</i>
Provision of raised entry treatments on Highfield Road, Two Gates Lane, Foredraft Street and Maple Tree Lane		<i>Funding to be identified before this can be progressed</i>
New partnership arrangement with TWM associated with the improvements		<i>This is being considered within the existing Voluntary Partnership Agreement with Centro & National Express West Midlands</i>
Provision of a parking/loading box at 90 Windmill Hill		
Promotion of a community-based travel plan linked to improvements to bus infrastructure and services		<i>Community group to be identified</i>
Dedicated right turn lane for traffic turning into Maple Tree Lane from Colley Gate	✓	<i>Measures investigated but rejected on safety grounds</i>
Junction improvements at Colley Gate/Colley Lane / Park Road junction	✓	<i>Proposals rejected following public consultation in favour of extended box junction</i>
Junction improvements at Windmill Hill / Two Gates Lane		<i>Improvements constrained by adjacent property</i>
Junction improvements at Windmill Hill / Beecher Road		<i>Box junction implemented</i>
Conversion of a number of the existing private car parks to public use should also be considered		
Landscaping of public and private car parks		<i>Section 106 Open Space and Public Realm funds are being pooled for future use on this area</i>
Partnership/Contract with Travel West Midlands		<i>This is being considered within the existing Voluntary Partnership Agreement with Centro & National Express West Midlands</i>
Personalised Travel Plans		<i>Community group to be identified</i>

Long term Actions (6 - 10 years; 2013/17)

Action		Status
Possible footway widening as part of long term traffic improvements	✓	<i>Measures investigated but rejected on safety grounds</i>
The provision of traffic signals at the Toys Lane junction (due to the need for minor widening of Windmill Hill)	✓	<i>Measures investigated but rejected on safety grounds</i>