

STOURBRIDGE AREA COMMITTEE – 12 MARCH 2007

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

STOURBRIDGE INFORMATION GATHERING EXERCISE

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Committee of the headline findings of the Stourbridge town centre information gathering exercise.

Background

2. At the meeting of this Committee on the 19 June 2006 Members endorsed an information gathering exercise for Stourbridge Town Centre.
3. The Stourbridge information gathering exercise commenced on Monday 2 October and continued until Friday 10 November 2006. The purpose of the exercise was to seek the views of the local community and other stakeholders on their perceptions of the existing town centre environment and opportunities for enhancements to support the future development and regeneration of Stourbridge town centre.
4. The exercise was carried out separately from the Stourbridge Area Action Plan which is scheduled in the Council's Local Development Scheme to commence at the start of 2008. It will therefore not form part of the formal statutory planning process. However, the results obtained from the consultation exercise will provide useful information which will support early evidence gathering for the development of the Area Action Plan.
5. The strategy for community engagement was prepared in accordance with the Council's 'How to Consult' document, which is a practical toolkit to assist in undertaking consultation activities and the 'Statement of Community Involvement' required as a part of the Local Development Framework.

6. The following methods of community engagement were used:

- Cabinet, Corporate Board and Stourbridge Area Committee Members were invited to attend a presentation outlining the purpose of the information gathering exercise and strategy for consultation with local stakeholders and the community. This took place on Tuesday 25 July 2006;
- a questionnaire was designed to collate responses. The questionnaire was distributed to local stakeholders as described below;
- a letter inviting local stakeholders to participate in the information gathering exercise was sent out to more than 700 local groups and organisations including local businesses, education and training establishments, youth groups, community groups, local service providers, welfare organisations, religions groups, environmental groups, developers, clubs and elderly groups. A copy of the questionnaire was posted with the letter and details of means of engagement provided;
- a temporary exhibition stand was set up opposite the clock in Stourbridge town centre and staffed from 10am to 4pm from Thursday 5 to Wednesday 11 October 2006 (not including Sunday 8 October). Copies of the questionnaire were distributed and officers were available to discuss any issues;
- a permanent exhibition stand was located at the entrance to Stourbridge Library for the 6 week period of the consultation. Posters were displayed explaining the purpose of the exercise and copies of the questionnaire were available to take away;
- the questionnaire formed a 'wrap-around' front page for the Stourbridge Chronicle on Thursday 12 October 2006;
- a web page (www.dudley.gov.uk/stourbridgetownmatters) was set up as part of the Dudley MBC web site which provided details of the exercise, an electronic version of the questionnaire to download and an email address (stourbridge@dudley.gov.uk) for respondents to submit comments;
- details of the consultation were outlined on the Council's Consultation Database; and
- Dudley Council Plus received telephone queries from members of the public and forwarded any specific questions to relevant officers.

7. Dudley Council's Strategic Research and Intelligence Team collated and analysed the results of the information gathering exercise. A total of 839 completed questionnaires were returned. 53% of the returns were made using the newspaper 'wrap-around', 45% by filling in the questionnaire and 2% were completed via the Dudley MBC website.

8. A report of the headline findings of the Stourbridge information gathering exercise will be circulated at the Committee meeting. In summary, key issues which were identified for future consideration include:
- assessment of traffic management and road improvement (including review of pedestrian priority and traffic congestion and consideration of pedestrianised areas);
 - improved street cleanliness (including addressing graffiti and litter);
 - reduction in crime (including CCTV and increased Police presence);
 - review of car parks and parking charges;
 - increased and improved retail offer in the town centre; and
 - reduction and control of the number of pubs and clubs within the town centre.
9. The report referred to in paragraph 8 provides details of how the Council and/ or relevant stakeholders are addressing or will seek to address each issue identified above.
10. The results will be disseminated as follows:
- press release to the local press;
 - a copy of the final consultation report will be available on the Stourbridge Town Matters website and Consultation Database, both of which are part of the Dudley MBC website;
 - copies of the final consultation report will be available in Stourbridge Library and in the receptions of the Council Houses in Stourbridge and Dudley.
 - Letters will be sent to local stakeholders who received a letter at the start of the information gathering exercise providing details of where the result can be found (e.g. Dudley MBC website); and
 - a summary of the results will be published in Stourbridge Town Talk and Dudley Matters.

Finance

10. The cost of the Stourbridge information gathering exercise is being met from existing revenue budgets.

Law

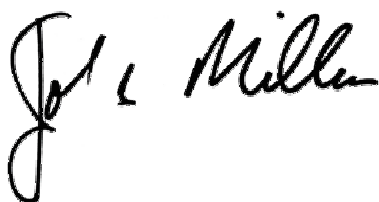
11. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 enables the Council to do anything which it considers is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of any part of the Borough.

Equality Impact

12. The proposals set out in this report accord with the Council's Equality & Diversity Policy.
13. The information gathering exercise will offer the opportunity to engage all sectors of the community including children and young people.

Recommendations

14. That the Committee notes the findings of the Stourbridge Town Matters Information Gathering Exercise



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List of Background Papers

- 1 Report to Stourbridge Area Committee (19 June 2006) 'Stourbridge Information Gathering Exercise'
- 2 Report to Stourbridge Area Committee (20 March 2006) 'Stourbridge Town Centre Masterplan (Area Action Plan)'
- 3 'How to Consult' (April 2004) Dudley MBC
- 4 'Draft Statement of Community Involvement' (March 2006) Dudley MBC