

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Town Centre Vitality

Thursday, 8 October 2009

Present: Councillor Peter Wilson (Chair) and Councillors Julia Berry, Alistair Bradley, Anthony Gee, Marie Gray, June Molyneaux and Stella Walsh

Also in attendance: Peter McAnespie (Planning Policy and Urban Design Team Leader), Conrad Heald (Town Centre and Markets Manager), Lee Boyer (Sports, Play and Physical Activity Manager), Christopher Bryan (Arts Development Officer) and Tony Uren (Democratic and Member Services Officer).

09.TCG.25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Pat Haughton, Harold Heaton and Geoffrey Russell.

09.TCG.26 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by any of the members of the Task Group in any of the meeting's agenda items.

09.TCG.27 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on Town Centre Vitality held on 24 September 2009 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

09.TCG.28 IMPROVEMENT OF THE CULTURAL OFFER WITHIN THE TOWN CENTRE

The Chair reminded the Group that the primary purpose of the meeting was to consider issues around the improvement of the cultural offer within the town centre as part of a number of environmental topics to be assessed.

The Chair welcomed Lee Boyer (Sports, Play and Physical Activity Manager) and Christopher Bryan (Arts Development Officer), who had been invited to attend the meeting to advise the Members of current policies and practices in relation to the organisation of acts and sporting events near the town centre and to discuss suggestions and plans for future campaigns and events.

(a) Arts/Cultural activities and opportunities

Christopher summarised the current arts and cultural offer within the town, highlighting the following elements of the programme:

- Chorley Little Theatre is a well respected and patronised entertainment provider. The Theatre operates wholly through volunteers, with marketing and promotional help from the Council.
- Chorley Arts Partnership operates from Chorley Community Centre, providing a range of arts activities and music workshops for young people in particular.
- Mid-Summer and other Arts festivals providing a range of free performances and street entertainment etc.
- Larger corporate events such as the Christmas Lights Switch-On and Chorley Smile initiatives that are organised by the Council's Events Manager.

The Task Group considered that the Lancastrian Room was not currently used by the Community as effectively as it might and was not realising its full potential. A number of Members referred to its past use for concerts, dances, etc and questioned whether the current hire fees were deterring a number of community groups from using the room. The Group did, however, appreciate the constraints on the use of the room (e.g limited seating capacity and the inflexibility of the space; lack of catering facilities; limited changing facilities for stage productions; lack of disabled persons' access to the stage; heating costs etc.). At the conclusion of the debate on the Lancastrian Room, the Group favoured an examination of feasible ways of encouraging a greater use of the Room, particularly for cultural and entertainment events, exhibitions and community group activities. A member also suggested consideration of the transfer of responsibility for the administration of the Lancastrian Room from the Governance Directorate to the People Directorate, with the aim of strengthening the marketing of the facility for appropriate cultural events and exhibitions.

A Member also referred to previous opportunities for the development of a cinema/bowling alley complex, which, for various reasons, had not materialised. The Task Group hoped that the Council would pursue any future opportunities for external sponsorship of the prestigious facility.

Reference was also made to the Chorley Film Club's contribution to the cultural offer of the town. The club which was based at the Chorley Little Theatre, provided a well-supported service showing a range of classic and modern films to town centre and parish audiences.

The Task Group also acknowledged the consequential benefits to the cultural life and the general economy of the town of the strengthening of the town centre's night-time economy. In this regard, Peter confirmed that the Town Centre Strategy recognised this aspiration and that the Strategy included appropriate targets and action plans to achieve the goal.

In addition, Peter drew the Task Group's attention to the Government's 'Percent for Art' Scheme, a programme under which a fee (usually a small percentage of the project cost) was placed on large scale development projects in order to fund and install 'public art' features. 'Percent for Art' programmes were used to fund public art in instances where private or specialised funding of public art was unavailable. The scheme was operated by the Arts Council, but only authorities with adequate Public Arts policies or strategies were likely to benefit from the scheme.

(b) Sports/Leisure activities and opportunities

Lee referred to the Council's investment in, and promotion of, grass roots community sports activities, including the organisation of the annual 'Get up Go' programme and the Play Day event on the Coronation Recreation Ground which regularly attracted up to 4000 people. The improved Astley Park provided a splendid leisure facility for the whole of the Borough and while minimal sports activities were organised within the town centre, the Council's officers supported and advised numerous community sports clubs on the organisation of games, tournaments, athletic runs, cycle races and BMX bike events, etc.

A member referred to the lack of athletics facilities in the town centre area and queried whether any of the existing facilities could be adapted and utilised for that purpose. In response, Peter reminded the Group of the ongoing work leading to the adoption of the new Local Development Framework for the Borough, indicating that any suggestions for the allocation or change of use of sites for recreational purposes could be made and assessed during the LDF consultation stages.

In reply to the Group's queries on the availability of activities for pre-teenage and early teenage young people, Lee informed the Members of the non-alcoholic club based in the Chorley Community Centre and the 'Saturday Night Alive' project currently being

trialled in the All Season Leisure Centre which allows 13-15 year old young people to participate in activities at the Centre at a minimal cost. There was a possibility of the scheme being replicated in Clayton-le-Woods and Coppull. The Members also mentioned the potential out-of-hours use of sports and games facilities available in local schools.

The Task Group accepted that the Borough lacked the infrastructure and facilities that would be required in order to attract major sporting events or tournaments. However, Lee reminded the Members of the Triathlon Championship event that had been held with some success in Rivington a few years ago, and referred to the prospect of the Borough hosting a similar prestigious orienteering event.

(c) Directory of Events and Activities/Sharing Information

Lee and Christopher highlighted the People Directorate's efforts to advise and work with the cultural, sports and community groups across the authority in order to ensure that events and activities were targeted at and held in the priority areas. However, this objective could sometimes be undermined by a lack of shared knowledge between organisations and an insufficient advertising of the events on offer.

The Task Group considered that the inadequate co-ordination and publicity afforded to cultural and sports activities throughout the Borough, and its consequent impact on visitors to the area, and the town centre in particular, needed to be addressed.

(d) Monitoring of performance

A number of Members queried the performance targets of the two officers from the People Directorate present and how they were monitored and measured. In reply, Christopher referred to the targets within the Leisure and Cultural Action Plan and Lee referred to his Sections links to the objectives and targets within the Corporate Strategy, highlighting that the majority of staff within the Section were partly externally funded by Sports England and the Lottery Fund, etc.

The Task Group requested the production of a report, for consideration at a future meeting, detailing the targets and/or action plans and future aspirations of the Sports and Cultural Sections of the People Directorate, extracted from the Directorate's Business Plan, and illustrating both how the targets are monitored and the perceived effectiveness of the action plan and events.

(e) Licensing Function

The Task Group requested an invitation to an appropriate officer from the Neighbourhoods Directorate to attend a future Task Group meeting to discuss the licensing issues affecting the town centre that would need to be addressed.

(f) Recommendations

At the conclusion of the comprehensive debate the Task Group commended the commitment and dedication of the two officers from the People Directorate and their respective staffs.

It was **AGREED** that the ideas and suggestions as outlined below be considered and reviewed by the Task Group at a later stage, with a view to firm recommendations on the cultural offer within the town centre being formulated:

Arts/Cultural issues

- That a review of the pricing structure relating to the Lancastrian Room and the publicity/promotions strategy be undertaken, with the aim of making local and regional groups more aware of the facilities on offer.

- That all future opportunities to explore with external developers plans to establish a Cinema and/or Bowling Alley complex in the Borough be pursued vigorously.
- That the Council's recognition and appreciation of Chorley Film Club's contribution to the Borough's cultural offer be recorded.
- That the Council be recommended to authorise the compilation of a Public Arts Policy or Strategy, with the aim of benefiting from the 'Percent for Art' scheme.

Sports Leisure issues

- That the feasibility of extending the 'Saturday Night Alive' project currently being operated in the All Seasons Leisure Centre to other parts of the Borough be explored.
- That the view of the Governing Bodies of local High Schools be sought on the possibility of the Schools' sports and recreational facilities being used for external community use.
- That the Council's officers explore the potential of the Borough and any feasible means, through partnership working and external funding, by which regional or national sports events or tournaments could be attracted to the Borough in order to boost visitor numbers to the town centre.
- That the officers examine the viability of extending the Play Day and other recreational activities into other parts of the town centre and Parish areas, taking account of the likely take-up and cost and resource implications.

Directory issues

- That the costs and manpower implications, and likely effectiveness, of producing an occasional Directory of forthcoming cultural and sports events and activities across the Borough as a means of improving the co-ordination, promotion and take-up of the events, be examined.

09.TCG.29 DATES OF NEXT MEETING

It was **AGREED** that the next two meetings of the Task Group be held at 6.30pm on Thursday 5 November and Thursday 3 December 2009 (following the Executive Cabinet meeting).

Chair