

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Town Centre Vitality

Thursday, 5 November 2009

Present: Councillor Peter Wilson (Chair) and Councillors Alistair Bradley, Anthony Gee, Marie Gray, Pat Haughton, June Molyneaux, Geoffrey Russell and Stella Walsh.

Also in attendance: Alan Capstick (Lancashire County Council's Assistant Area Manager (Highways)), Cath Burns (Economic Development Manager), Peter McAnespie (Planning Policy and Urban Design Team Leader), Martin Walls (Service Manager – Streetscene), Conrad Heald (Town Centre and Markets Manager) and Tony Uren (Democratic and Member Services Officer).

09.TCG.30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Julia Berry and Mick Muncaster.

09.TCG.31 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.32 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on Town Centre Vitality held on 8 October 2009 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

09.TCG.33 GATEWAYS INTO THE TOWN CENTRE/SIGNAGE, ETC.

The Chair reminded the Task Group that the primary purpose of the meeting was to consider issues around the gateways into the town and the adequacy and effectiveness of informative and directional signage around the town centre, as part of the environmental issues to be assessed.

The Chair welcomed, in particular, Alan Capstick (Lancashire County Council's Assistant Area Manager (Highways)) and Martin Walls (Service Manager – Streetscene Services) who had been invited to attend the meeting to advise the Members of the current policies and practices on highway and access issues.

Cath Burns (Economic Development Manager) reminded the Group that the Town Centre Urban Design Strategy included a number of measures aimed at enhancing visitor information by:

- developing a hierarchy of information and signage to reveal town centre locations and attractions;
- introducing a comprehensive and co-ordinated signage palette to consist of a variety of signs;
- identifying and defining 'gateways' to the town centre.

Cath also confirmed that a new Town Centre Map was in the final stage of production. The final draft would be displayed on the town centre notice board during a short consultation period, following which it would be exhibited on the town centre car park signboards.

The Task Group's discussions focused on the following principal elements of the access and signage issues:

- The lack of signs directing visitors approaching the town centre to nearby car parks was highlighted.
- The Task Group favoured the installation of a large brown motorway information sign to advertise Chorley's markets and other attractions, complemented by other directional signage at appropriate locations close to roundabouts and gateway points and within the town centre.
Alan confirmed that the Highways Agency was the responsible authority for the erection and maintenance of motorway signs, to whom bids for new signs could be submitted by either the Lancashire County Council or the Borough Council. A large brown sign was expected to cost in the region of £10,000. Additional highway signs would need to comply with the statutory highway regulations and directives and be authorised by the County Council.
The Members also accepted the need for a co-ordinated approach in relation to the network of town centre signs to ensure a consistency and uniformity in the size, colour and content of the signs.
- Reference was also made to the dependence of the vitality and viability of the town centre on the availability of sufficient and easily accessible car parking areas.
- The Task Group members drew attention to the wide variation in the appearance and attractiveness of gateway notices, highlighting the need for a prioritised programme of improvement to be incorporated in the pending Signage Strategy and Action Plan.
- Martin Walls reminded the Group of the role of the Neighbourhood Officers in helping to maintain a clean and tidy town centre and referred to the current negotiations with the County Council to produce a practical enforcement policy to apply to the town centre in relation to Cafe and street furniture, 'A' boards and potential obstructions in the town centre. The Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on Highway issue had recommended the development of a Pavement Café Policy in the light of past concerns at the encroachment of market stalls and café tables onto pavements in some instances.
- One Member had previously raised the untidiness and problems associated with the East Ward Underpass and the discussion extended to the current state and safety of pedestrian access to the Clifford Street car park and across car park areas.

Recommendations

At the conclusion of the comprehensive debate, the Task Group **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 gateway and signage issues in the town centre being formulated:

- That the Task Group supports and commends the need for an adequate and effective number of signs directing visitors to each of the town centre car parks to be placed at strategic locations within and around the town centre.
- That the Group also recommends the provision of an appropriate number of large information signs on the motorway and highways to promote Chorley's market town status and other major attractions.
- That a comprehensive and feasible strategy for the installation of promotional and directional signs at appropriate locations within and around the town

centre be devised in conjunction with the Lancashire County Council, for incorporation into the Signage Strategy and Action Plan as envisaged in the Town Centre Audit and Urban Design Strategy.

- That the Task Group supports the development of a parking strategy for the town centre as a matter of urgency.
- That the Officers be requested to report to a future meeting on the current location of existing gateway signs and the suggested location of any required additional signs, with estimated costings.
- That the Task Group supports and wishes to participate in the production of the projected Pavement Café Policy, which the Members hope will take into account the need to balance the aim of preventing clutter and obstructions in the town centre with the need to protect commercial interests and the vibrancy of the town.
- That the Officers be requested to liaise with the County Council to examine issues around the current state and security of pedestrian access routes to the town centre, particularly through underpasses and across car parks, and report recommendations to a future meeting of the Task Group.

09.TCG.34 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was **AGREED** that the next meeting of the Task Group on Thursday, 3 December 2009 consider issues around vacant premises in the town centre.

Chair