

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Town Centre Vitality

Tuesday, 23 February 2010

Present: Councillor Peter Wilson (Chair) and Julia Berry, Alistair Bradley, Anthony Gee, Marie Gray, Pat Houghton, June Molyneaux, Mick Muncaster and Geoffrey Russell

Also in attendance:

Executive Member (Business): Councillor Peter Malpas

Chorley Council Officers: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy), Cath Burns (Head of Economic Development), Conrad Heald (Town Centre and Markets Manager), Chris Bryan (Arts Development Officer) and Tony Uren (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

Disability Forum Co-ordinator: Eileen Bee

Chorley Retailers: Malcolm Allen, Nigel Clare and Peter Morgenroth.

10.TCG.08 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Harold Heaton and Stella Walsh.

10.TCG.09 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.

10.TCG.10 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minute of the meeting of the Town Centre Overview and Scrutiny Task Group held on 14 January 2010 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

10.TCG.11 OPEN DISCUSSION WITH WITNESSES

The Chair reminded the Members that, following the study of the five identified topic areas, it was appropriate for the Task Group to seek views from the Executive Member (Business), the Disability Forum, the Chamber of Trade and representatives of local retailers before the report and recommendations from the inquiry were finalised.

Accordingly, the Chair welcomed the following witnesses who had been invited to attend the meeting to participate in an open discussion on the Task Group's review of the vitality and viability of the town centre :

- Councillor Peter Malpas (Executive Member (Business));
- Eileen Bee (Disability Forum Co-ordinator);
- Malcolm Allen, Nigel Clare and Peter Morgenroth (Chorley retailers).

Mr Morgenroth was also representing the Chorley Chamber of Trade.

The Chair explained that the review had been conducted to focus around the following five key themes:

- Marketing and promotion of the town centre;
- Improvement of the cultural offer within the town centre;
- Gateways into the town centre (including parking, signage, etc);

- Use of vacant properties/Enforcement issues;
- Markets issues.

A summary note of the suggested recommendations that had been made by the Task Group over the course of its past meetings was circulated at the meeting to assist the debate. The Chair emphasised the current draft status of the document which would form the basis of the debate at its final meeting on 4 March and requested, in particular, the views of the invited witnesses on any additional measures or initiatives which the authority might consider to attract more shoppers and visitors to the town centre.

During the ensuing debate, structured around the identified five town centre themes, the following salient issues, points of view and suggestions were raised by the Members and witnesses.

Marketing and promotion of the town centre.

- There is currently insufficient co-ordination of town centre promotion and marketing between the Council and High Street and independent traders.
- There is an acceptance that the degree of business experienced by town centre traders is to a large extent, dependent on the commodity sold (eg shoppers are attracted to the Markets on Tuesdays and Fridays; certain shops' business is brisker on Wednesdays, etc) and future promotions should be targeted accordingly.
- There is a need to promote the wide variety of shops available in the town centre, particularly the number of quality independent retailers, in an attempt to attract both residents who do not normally visit the town centre and other visitors from the surrounding catchment area.
- The promotion of the late night opening of shops on Thursday evenings would be reliant on more town centre retailers being persuaded to extend their opening hours.
- Future marketing and promotion policies and strategies should examine all means of attracting more shoppers and visitors to the town centre (eg through quality and attractive environmental improvements; reasonable car parking fees structure; provision of sufficient restaurants and cafes (especially to accommodate evening shoppers).
- The Council's Officers to be requested to consider the production of a small single sheet to promote the town centre, which could be used by retailers to accompany goods despatched to customers.
- The Council's Officers to be requested to consider the viability and cost implications of advertising the wide diversity of shops and goods available in the town centre on local commercial radio stations, particularly during the period leading up to Christmas.
- The concepts and ideas put forward at the meeting be assessed by a Task Group of the Town Centre Forum, with a view to the formulation of a comprehensive Marketing Action Plan for the Town Centre.
- The role of the Town Centre and its associated focus groups in co-ordinating an effective strategy for the improvement of the town centre to be acknowledged.

Gateways into the town centre (including parking, signage, etc)

- The Council's Officers be requested to examine the possible extension of the scheme currently operated with Booths, under which £1 vouchers were awarded by the Supermarket retailer to shoppers at the store as a discount off parking fees, with appropriate retailers being approached to ascertain if they would be willing to participate in a similar scheme.
- The introduction of a herring-bone parking system on Market Street and St George's Street to be considered.

- The needs of disabled drivers to be taken into account when any revision of the car parking strategies are considered.
- The Town Centre Task Group's findings report should acknowledge the findings of the Task and Finish Group set up by the Equality Forum to examine issues surrounding town centre accessibility and request the Executive Cabinet to support any action plan recommended by the Equality Forum Task Group.
- Any review of the current policies regulating the establishment and operation of Pavement Cafes and the installation of free standing advertisement boards and other street furniture should take into account the impact on and need to protect the interests of disabled people.
- Requests be made to the relevant authorities to seek an improvement in the condition of the underpass and the pedestrian accesses to the town centre from the Chorley Interchange and the railway station.

It was **AGREED** that the comments and suggestions of the Members and witnesses as outlined above be considered and reviewed by the Task Group at its next meeting, with a view to firm recommendations being incorporated in the Group's findings report.

10.TCG.12 ARTS AND SPORT & PLAY ACTIVITIES

Following on from their attendance at the meeting of the Task Group on 8 October 2009, the Sports, Play and Physical Activity Manager and the Arts Development Officer presented a joint report which set out the range of cultural and sport/leisure activities organised or assisted by the Council in, or within the general vicinity of, the town centre.

It was the Group's general consensus of opinion that the cost of hiring the Lancastrian Room was currently too prohibitive and most community groups.

As a means of optimising the use of the Lancastrian facility, a Member proposed the introduction of a trial scheme under which the Council could agree a programme of events (eg concerts, dances, etc) to be organised by local community groups, with the Council allowing the free use of the Hall and accepting responsibility for the promotion and marketing of the events in return for the retention of entrance fees.

It was **AGREED** that the Member's suggestion for optimising the use of the Lancastrian Room, as outlined, be considered further at the next meeting along with other suggested recommendations for inclusion in the Task Group's findings report.

10.TCG.13 TOWN CENTRE VISIT

The Town Centre and Markets Manager presented a copy of each of the Town Centre Master Plans for the towns of Chesterfield and Ludlow.

It was **AGREED**:

- (1) That a copy of each complete Master Plan for Chesterfield and Ludlow be made available for inspection in the Members' Room.
- (2) That an Executive Summary of each report be provided to members of the Task Group and that, if subsequently Members consider that it will be beneficial to visit any of the towns, a recommendation could be included in the Group's findings report.

10.TCG.14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Task Group noted that the final meeting of the Group was scheduled to be held on Thursday, 4 March 2010.

Chair