

# Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Town Centre Vitality

**Thursday, 4 March 2010**

**Present:** Councillor Peter Wilson (Chair) and Councillors Julia Berry, Alistair Bradley, Anthony Gee, Marie Gray, Pat Haughton, Harold Heaton, June Molyneaux, Mick Muncaster, Geoffrey Russell and Stella Walsh

**Also in attendance:** Jamie Carson (Director of People and Places), Cath Burns (Head of Economic Development), Conrad Heald (Town Centre and Markets Manager) and Tony Uren (Democratic and Member Services Officer).

## **10.TCG.15 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.16 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting of the Town Centre Overview and Scrutiny Task Group held on 23 February 2010 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

## **10.TCG.17 MARKETS ISSUES**

The Task Group, at its last meeting on 23 February 2010, had requested the Town Centre and Markets Manager to submit to this meeting a short-term action plan for the enhancement of the appearance and vitality of the Flat Iron Market in particular, in the context of the long-term proposals for the Market.

The members agreed to consider the action plan presented with the remainder of the material to be assessed at the following item.

## **10.TCG.18 FINDINGS REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Task Group had been provided with a summary list of recommendations and proposed initiatives which had been suggested for further consideration by the Task Group at earlier meetings of the Group. The proposals had been categorised and listed under the various themes identified and examined by the Group over the course of the inquiry.

The Chair indicated that the Members would need to consider the suggestions in depth and determine which of the proposals should be supported for inclusion in the Group's findings report. The Group would need to decide its priority recommendations and principal focus of the findings report and delete duplicated and unviable suggestions.

Following a comprehensive debate, it was **AGREED:**

- (1) That the suggestions put forward by the Task Group in relation to Sport and Play facilities be not included in the findings report as the issues are outside the remit of the Task Group.

- (2) That the following prioritised and categorised proposals to enhance the vitality and viability of the Town Centre be approved for inclusion in the Task Group's findings and recommendations report for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **Formulation of a comprehensive Marketing Action Plan**

That the following concepts and ideas put forward by the Task Group be assessed by a Task Group of the Town Centre Workshop, with a view to the formulation of a comprehensive Marketing Plan for the Town Centre with the ultimate aim 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 cafés (especially to accommodate evening shoppers):

- selected coach operators (eg Shearings) be reminded of the Markets and other attractions within the town centre and requested to contact the Town Centre and Markets Manager for information on available coach parks;
- examination of the means of enhancing the localised nature of the Farmers' and other themed markets to improve their distinctiveness by, for example, naming them 'Chorley Farmers Market' or linking them to relevant themes (eg Cake Fairs, etc) with more effective advance promotion and advertising;
- the expansion of the present marketing and promotional campaigns and strategy to encompass the whole of the town centre, with the wider distribution of promotional leaflets throughout the town centre;
- address the currently insufficient co-ordination of town centre promotion and marketing between the Council and High Street and independent traders;
- accept 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 Markets on Tuesdays and Fridays; certain shops' business is brisker on Wednesday, etc), and target future promotions accordingly;
- 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 through the production of a user friendly A4 promotional leaflet and Parish Council newsletter inserts;
- promotion of the late night opening of shops on Thursday evenings will be reliant on more town centre retailers being persuaded to extend their opening hours;
- Council's officers 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;
- Council's officers 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 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 events, be examined.

## **Prepare a Strategy for an evening economy**

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

## **Signage Strategy**

- That a recommendation be made to the Lancashire County Council for the erection of brown motorway advertising signs to promote the Markets and other visitor attractions in Chorley.
- That a review of the directional signage to and within the town centre for motorists and pedestrians be undertaken.
- 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 Officers undertake a review of the current location of existing gateway signs, with a view to suggesting the location and estimated cost of any required additional signs.
- 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.

## **Car Parking Strategy**

- That 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.
- That the feasibility of the introduction of a herring-bone parking system on Market Street and St George's Street be considered.
- That the needs of disabled drivers be taken into account when any revision of the car parking strategies are considered.

## **Town Centre Living**

That residential usage of town centre properties be encouraged by the following means:

- The Neighbourhoods Directorate be requested to offer an advice service to owners of properties in the town centre that are capable in whole or in part of conversion to flats, in order to clarify the relevant regulations, directives and standards which require to be complied with.
- The Strategic Housing Services Section be requested to offer assistance in the marketing of new affordable housing units provided by Registered Social Landlords in the town centre, and provide details of applicants on the housing working list to the owners of the housing units.

- Developers of new schemes in the town centre be encouraged to consider mixed use developments (comprising retail, storage, residential units, etc) whenever practicable.

### **Vacant Property Policy**

That an Officer be identified to undertake the role of Lead Co-ordinator responsible for the implementation of an Empty Property Policy setting out the practices and procedures to be adopted and implemented in relation to vacant town centre properties, including a package of advice and guidance to prospective developers on relevant planning application procedures, licensing regulations, funding sources and business support services etc.

### **Develop and Deliver Short and Long Term Plans for the Markets**

- (1) That a short term action plan containing realistic and viable measures aimed at enhancing the appearance and vitality of the Flat Iron market, achieving maximum occupancy of stalls; and reducing arrears of stall rents be compiled and costed. The action plan should include practical measures to encourage a uniform charging policy and offer of subsidies or discounts to market traders paying rents by direct debit or in advance, or occupying more than one stall, etc. The plan should also take into account the current economic situation and not impose any undue financial burden that would discourage traders from the market.

Several suggested measures that could be explored for possible inclusion in the action plan should be itemised in the Task Group's findings report.

- (2) That the long term action plan seeking to achieve the following objectives be approved in principle:
  - Replace existing stalls (5m x 5m) with
    - (a) Gazebo stalls (3m x 3m)
    - (b) Umbrella stalls (3.5m x 3m);
  - Examine the introduction of a standard pattern for market stall canopies, with a choice of colours being made available for individual stall holders;
  - Review the Markets layout in conjunction with the Flat Iron area urban regeneration scheme for integration into the Market Walk Phase II design scheme;
  - Install powerpoints for Flat Iron market stalls;
  - Pursue the provision of new transport (electric) equipment to move market equipment and waste.

### **Develop and Deliver a Pavement Café Policy**

That the Task Group supports the current review of the 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.

- (3) That the Officers be requested to examine the resource (cost and staffing) implications for each of the above recommendations for inclusion in the findings and recommendations report.

- (4) That the draft final report and recommendations be circulated to the Chair and members of the Task Group for their endorsement prior to its presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Chair