

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Town Centre Vitality

Thursday, 6 August 2009

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

Also in attendance: Councillors Peter Malpas (Executive Member (Business)), Cath Burns (Head of Economic Development), Peter McAnespie (Planning Policy and Urban Design Team Leader), Conrad Heald (Town Centre and Markets Manager) and Tony Uren (Democratic and Member Services Officer).

07.CCS.01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Marie Gray.

07.CCS.02 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.

07.CCS.03 TOWN CENTRE AUDIT AND URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY

The Planning Policy and Urban Design Team Leader made a short presentation on the key elements of the Town Centre Audit and Urban Design Strategy which had been endorsed by the Executive Cabinet as a guide to future town centre interventions in November 2008.

The Urban Design Strategy had emerged from the outcome of a town centre audit undertaken by Consultants in the winter/spring of 2007/08 through a series of surveys, workshops and consultation events to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the town centre.

The strategy identified the following 10 broad objectives to improve the town centre and attract new investment into the town.

Two Broad Aspirations:

- Make Chorley THE contemporary market town for the North West.
- Make Chorley the vibrant heart of the Borough.

Four Town Wide Initiatives:

- Make a diverse and sustainable town centre: promote mixed-use development.
- Revitalise Chorley's Built Heritage.
- Reveal the Town Centre: Signage/Links/Gateways.
- Chorley: a walkable town centre.

Four Specific Projects

- Market Street: A Thriving Street Again.
- Chorley Markets: A New Setting.
- Chorley Boulevard: Ring Road Landscape.
- Make a Civic Quarter for Chorley.

The strategy document also detailed a range of related projects and initiatives, including a number of initiatives already underway, to realise the ten objectives over a five year implementation timetable. Indicative costings were also shown against a number of the projects.

Copies of the Town Centre Audit and Urban Design Strategy were circulated at the meeting and the Task Group **AGREED** that the Strategy document would be a useful reference point and tool by which to take the review forward.

07.CCS.04 SCOPING OF THE REVIEW

(a) Terms of Reference

The Task Group agreed the following terms of reference to be applied to the Overview and Scrutiny review of the town centre:

1. To investigate, consider and evaluate issues and factors relevant to the review of the vitality and viability of Chorley town centre.
2. To make recommendations where appropriate.

(b) Key aims and objectives

The Task Group was requested to identify the principal aims and objectives of the inquiry.

The Members considered suggestions that the inquiry should focus on a number of selected themes and characteristics of the town centre, with the future meetings concentrating on the various aspects and issues to be considered under each theme.

Following a comprehensive and useful discussion, the Task Group **AGREED** that the Town Centre overview and scrutiny inquiry be focused on the following principal themes, taking account of the relevant identified issues and other material considerations that may be raised by Members:

Environment and Parking Issues

How the review can help to create an environment that will influence the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Factors such as vacant retail and office space; pedestrian flows; highways and accessibility issues; street furniture; environmental improvement works; ways of encouraging greater use of town centre premises for residential purposes; management of pedestrianised areas to preclude unauthorised use by vehicles and bicycles; whether parking policies are an incentive or disincentive to visitors, would inform the Group's discussions.

Markets Issues

Relevant factors to be assessed should include the impact of any outcomes of past scrutiny inquiries; the impact of the recent Covered Market refurbishments; ways of enhancing the vitality of the Flat Iron Market; the effectiveness of Themed Markets.

Marketing/Promotion of Town Centre

Factors including the effectiveness of current marketing strategies; plans for future events and initiatives; and suggestions for alternative marketing policies could be considered.

(c) Vision for the future

The vision for the town centre was contained in the Town Centre Audit and Urban Design Strategy.

(d) Scoping Document

A blank copy of the scoping document had been supplied to the Task Group. The document would need to be completed at the next meeting to take account of Members' discussions and agreement on the progress of the inquiry.

07.CCS.05 RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The Task Group identified the following documents that would need to be presented to and considered by the Task Group during the course of its review:

- Chorley Town Centre Strategy;
- Town Centre Audit and Urban Design Strategy;
- Town Centre Health Checks;
- Consultants' reports on town centre businesses;
- Pedestrian flow counts, etc;
- Final reports of recent scrutiny inquiries into the Chorley Markets and Parkwise.

07.CCS.06 WITNESSES

The Task Group **AGREED** to interview and/or consult the following Members, Officers, individuals and organisations during the course of the review:

- Executive Member (Business)
- Head of Communications, Marketing and Tourism;
- Service Manager (Streetscene Services);
- Selected representatives of town centre retailers, businesses and market traders;
- Disability Forum Co-ordinator;
- Equality Forum.

07.CCS.07 VISITS TO OTHER TOWN CENTRES

The Task Group accepted the benefits to be gained from visiting other comparable towns to view at first hand and discuss with Town Centre Managers and retailers how the centres are managed, together with the impact of any new initiatives, with a view to how Chorley Council can learn from best practice elsewhere.

The Members **AGREED** to identify the town centres they wish to visit during the course of the inquiry at the next meeting of the Task Group.

07.CCS.08 WAY FORWARD FOR THE TASK GROUP

The Members discussed the way in which the Town Centre inquiry should be pursued and taken forward.

The Task Group accepted that the 10 objectives of the Town Centre Audit and Urban Design Strategy and related projects would form a logical focus for the review within the context of the three identified themes. The Members suggested that the Task Group could identify and focus its deliberations around selected priority projects from the Strategy, considering in particular any progress that had so far been made, the affordability and feasibility of the projects, with the ultimate aim of making recommendations on the viability of the projects and any suggested means by which the implementation or achievement of the projects could be influenced.

The Task Group requested the officers to provide the Members with updated copies of the list of Town Centre Audit and Urban Design Strategy projects, categorised into the respective themed areas, with an indication of the expected low, medium or high level costing of each project.

This would enable the Task Group to determine the specific projects on which it wished to concentrate its discussions.

07.CCS.09 FUTURE MEETING DATES

The Task Group **AGREED** to meet next on Thursday, 20 August 2009 at 6.30pm.

The Group hoped to agree an inquiry programme and calendar of future meeting dates at that meeting.

Chair