

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Town Centre Vitality

Thursday, 20 August 2009

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Julia Berry

Also in attendance: Jane Meek (Corporate Director (Business), Peter McAnespie (Planning Policy and Urban Design Team Leader) and Tony Uren (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

09.TCG.10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

09.TCG.11 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.12 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting of the Town Centre Overview and Scrutiny Task Group held on 6 August 2009 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

09.TCG.13 SCOPING OF THE REVIEW

The Task Group's instructions were sought on the completion of the scoping document for the review.

The Members were reminded that the respective terms of reference, key aims and objectives and information requirements had been agreed at the last meeting when the Group had selected a number of specific topics and themes around which the inquiry would be structured.

It was, therefore, **AGREED** that the relevant identified issues and material considerations accepted at the initial meeting of the Task Group on 6 August 2009, as set out in the minutes of that meeting, form the basis of the inquiry project outline. The completed scoping document would be presented to the next meeting for endorsement.

09.TCG.14 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

In response to the Task Group's request at the last meeting, a copy of the final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Inquiry into Chorley's Markets published in September 2004 had been provided to Members of the Task Group. Further reports on the actions that had been taken subsequently would be presented to the future meetings of the Task Group that would be considering specifically Markets issues and the marketing/promotion of the town centre.

The other relevant reports, strategies and documents identified by Members at the last meeting would be provided to the Task Group in sufficient time before the relevant documents were due to be assessed by the Group within the agreed timetable.

09.TCG.15 WAY FORWARD: PRIORITY AREAS

As requested at the initial meeting of the Task Group, a schedule of the categorised projects and initiatives contained within the Town Centre Audit and Urban Design Strategy was enclosed. The implementation schedule included a note of the expected level of costings associated with the projects.

The Task Group was requested to identify the selected projects/initiatives on which the Group wished to focus and examine in more depth, with a view to consideration of the ways in which the Group could assess their relative effectiveness or help to influence their implementation.

The Members reiterated their suggestions that the inquiry be conducted around the specific themes agreed at the last meeting, accepting that it would be beneficial to concentrate attention on a few selected aspects of each topic if the Group was to achieve its objective of making recommendations that might ultimately influence the enhancement of the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Following a useful discussion, it was **AGREED** that the Task Group considers at separate meetings issues surrounding the following principal topic areas, taking account of all relevant factors, including those indicated below:

Environment Issues

(a) Gateways into town centre/signage

Factors including connections into the town centre (particularly from Chorley East Ward); underpasses, pedestrian crossings, etc; adequacy of directional signage within the town centre and on the periphery of the town centre; the attractiveness of the gateways into the town centre.

(b) Use of vacant properties

Factors including policies on the potential promotion or enhancement of the appearance of vacant properties; promotion of infill development and encouragement of refurbishment of empty flats over shops to assist increased residential usage within the town centre.

(c) Improvement of the Cultural offer

Factors including the development and implementation of a cultural strategy for the town centre; issues surrounding the evening culture of the town centre; increased frequency of events and activities (eg food/arts festivals; wide-ranging programme of events to attract all age groups).

Markets Issues

Review of recommendations contained in a previous overview and scrutiny inquiry into the Markets to assess the effectiveness of implemented actions and examine the reasons for current outstanding actions.

Examination of potential means of enhancing the Flat Iron Market to complement and feed into the recently commissioned Consultants' review.

Marketing/Promotional Issues

Review of effectiveness of current strategies and suggestions for additional means of promotion.

It was likely that parking issues and leverage of available funds for projects would be encompassed within almost all of the different strands of the review.

09.TCG.16 VISITS TO OTHER TOWN CENTRES

The Members' instructions were sought on any comparable towns that the Task Group wished to visit during the course of the inquiry in order to learn from their management policies and practices.

Peter McAnespie advised the Task Group that the Consultants engaged on the last Town Centre Audit had suggested visits to a number of well-established town centres, including Ludlow and Hexham. A Member also suggested a visit to Burnley, who were currently undertaking a widespread programme of refurbishment.

It was **AGREED**:

1. That arrangements be made for the Task Group and Officers to visit Burnley town centre to view and discuss Burnley Council's plans to transform the town centre with Council Officers.
2. That the Chorley Town Centre Audit Consultants be requested to suggest one other well-established town centre that the Task Group would benefit from visiting.
3. That West Lancashire Council be requested to provide Chorley Council with a report on the progress of its programme of Ormskirk town centre improvement works, highlighting any delivery problems.

09.TCG.17 CALENDAR OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was **AGREED**:

1. That the next two meetings of the Task Group be held at 6.30pm on Thursday, 24 September 2009 and Thursday, 8 October 2009.
2. That the topics to be considered at each of the meetings be determined by the Chair and Officers, depending on the availability of the respective witnesses.

Chair