

ECONOMIC WELL BEING SCRUTINY PANEL
DISTRICT CENTRES INQUIRY
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28th OCTOBER 2009

Present:

Councillors Ball (Chair), Bogle, Burke (except item 13), Fuller, Osmond, Sollitt and Wells

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the inquiry meeting held on 13th October 2009, be approved and signed as a correct record. (Copy of the minutes circulated with the agenda and appended to the signed minutes).

12. DISTRICT CENTRES – BEST PRACTICE

The Panel considered and noted the report of the Head of Policy and Improvement introducing information to aid the development of the inquiry, relating to best practice with regards to supporting the vitality and viability of District Centres. (Copy of report circulated with the agenda and appended to the signed minutes).

Regeneration Policy Officer, Bristol City Council

The Panel received a presentation from Jason Thorne, Regeneration Policy Officer based on a Retail Study carried out in Bristol in 2007:

- Bristol took a strategic approach to marketing
- developed a place management approach improving team working
- Created 4 clusters each with their own co-ordinator responsible for action plans – these people have become the one point of contact as requested by traders
- Results of walkabouts and trade surveys were fed into action plans.
- Raised profile with traders and encouraged better communications.
- Encouraged the establishment of trade associations.
- Consultants were jointly commissioned with Planning department to help with the Local Development Framework not just the district centres.
- Parking provision was identified as needing better promotion – no plan to bring in charging in parking yet.
- Bristol have experienced a higher than average vacancy rate before the recession there is currently no demand for more floorspace.
- Neighbourhood Committees tap into wider range of views from ward Councillors and residents.

Economic Development Manager

The Panel received a presentation from the Economic Development Manager detailing:

- SCC approach is less formalised than other authorities - structured and planned around vulnerable areas.

- Focus on trade associations (Bitterne, Shirley and Woolston) where they don't exist encouraging them to form by working with existing groups within areas i.e working with housing associations in Woolston to build relationships with wider agencies.
- Business advice is being targeted in districts. Business Link were introduced in Woolston a few years ago. Currently working in Bitterne.
- Bitterne Market has been a success looking to do the same in Shirley and Woolston. The Bitterne Market is run by Bitterne Village Traders Association.
- Future Jobs Fund has been successful in providing work placements looking to help with environmental issues.
- Help with vacant properties has not yet been rolled out to district centres.
- Commercial properties are easily searched for on a property register covering Hampshire.

Chair of the established Bedford Place Traders Association

- Bedford Place Traders Association was formed due to the proposed closure of the car park in the vicinity which subsequently remained opened.
- Monthly meetings are held with ward councillors, local businesses, residents associations and the Baptist Church.
- They produce their own Christmas brochure which goes to hotels and residents annually in mid-November.
- Issues include proposed parking charges, unsociable activity arising from the night time economy; during the daytime substance misuse and unwanted street people.
- Whilst not against a BID, felt that it failed in Southampton because it was dominated by the larger businesses in the City.
- A Key to the success of Bedford Place is its unique identity.

13. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHIRLEY TOWN CENTRE

The Panel considered and noted the report of the Head of Policy and Improvement introducing information relating to the development of Shirley Town Centre and best practice examples of what worked well and lessons learnt. (Copy of report circulated with the agenda and appended to the signed minutes).

Principal Transport Planner and the Transport Policy Team Leader

Background to Shirley Town Centre:

- Mix of independent and multinationals
- Long High Street – 259 business premises (half retail, third services)
- 21 Units (7%) are vacant (half the national average)
- Good night time economy
- Good transport links to City Centre

Impacts of recession and the supermarket:

- Pound shop replaces Woolworths
- Bakery and Manor Pub have closed
- 3 times national charity shops and discount stores

- Shops doing well include camping equipment, shoe repair and cash generators

What has Southampton City Council done?

- Attracting investment and adaptation – Sainsbury's redeveloped in 2005; included redevelopment of precinct shops, library and car parks (£106 funding); improved public realm, seating and open paved areas.
- Shirley 'Streets Ahead' Project
- Latest improvements: 2008/09 £1m on footway; cycling and parking facilities; pedestrian crossing and signal reconfiguration.
- Consultation – involvement of businesses and public in consultations on local plan review and highway improvements
- Outcomes and impacts – in good health, 2006 household survey 32% shopped in district centre compared with 21% in City Centre; reasonable environmental quality and adequate signs of maintenance; good street scene and good diversity of retail and other services.