

FROM THE OFFICE OF LYNDA WALTHO MP:

REPORT OF STOURBRIDGE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION MEETING
16.10.09

Held at St Thomas's church hall.

1. Welcome and introduction by Lynda Waltho MP.

2. **PROGRESS REPORT** – Cllr Les Jones spoke to some of the items referred to in Town Centre Manager Hannah Rogers' written report. He stressed that not all the projects are instantly achievable, but there is still every reason to try.

- Crown Centre - The part of Modus involved in Stourbridge is still trading. Negotiations re the Crown Centre continue and the Council is trying to help things come to fruition.
- Bus station re-development – will include taking the dog-leg out of the ramp. Lynda expressed the hope that the ultimate aim would be total removal of the subway.
- Rapid Transit Route – if successful this would re-open the Stourbridge to Walsall main line to heavy rail traffic but the aim is also to include a tram-train link.
- Trefoil Gardens traffic signals – a planning mistake if there was one. Some legal issues remain but the lights will definitely go.
- Vacant Properties – not as bad as in many other places. Castle & Crystal Credit Union might take premises on Market St – not yet certain. If it happens it might also include a 'council services' shop as well.
- Government funding of £52,000 – Les thinks an allocation of £10,000 to each town centre as a lump sum and then a further £12,000 to be shared out based on match-funding projects submitted by Area Committees might be the fairest disposal.
- Stourbridge Area Action Plan – Annette Roberts said she would welcome a contribution from this group. She would like to attend a presentation / meeting of the Regeneration Group and maybe the Township Council as well. Change of land usage will need to be considered re some areas but, while their

expertise is to be valued, it is important for officials etc. to listen rather more, to be open to suggestions from others than themselves.

- It is hoped that consultation could flush out proposals and also potential investors. The amount of disruption to be caused when work on the Crown Centre eventually starts was queried, on the basis that one reason given for the closure of the market was the invasive effect of the impending building work.
- Northern Gateway Project – Section 106 funding should be sufficient to finish the work that has been started.
- Town Centre Events: looking to have more special events. Looking for an event to be peculiar /special to Stourbridge e.g. to compare with cheese rolling or something similar.

Discussion / questions broadened out. Comments have been organised into topics, not necessarily in the order in which they were submitted to the meeting.

Are there any plans for a public convenience in the bus station subway? What about stand-alone and/or super-loos? Stourbridge night life: maybe those who profit from the evening/night economy should be obliged to pay towards the cleaning and upkeep of streets, toilets etc. The subways are foul – Worcester St subway floods when it rains; they all do. Some things are essential for society etc. and shouldn't have to be profit making.

NOTED: concern about lack of public conveniences.

Les Jones: Subway toilets not possible. Maintenance and counter-vandalism costs are astronomical.

Lynda: asked about the extent of input from local business people? Could it be enhanced?

Re special events: advertising for them needs to improve; more poster sites are needed.

They need planning permission. Why not use council owned shops and other buildings as advertising frontages; also kiosks?

How many people knew about the Canal open weekend? It wasn't a council event but brings people to town and it's in everyone's interest for it to be successful.

Couldn't the vacant land adjacent to the canal be used to enlarge space available for the Open Weekend? It is privately owned by a firm registered in the Isle of Man. There was discussion around the possibilities v. the frustrations of this plot of land. Doctors' surgery had been suggested. What about as a site for a new glass museum?

Lynda: The land is designated for industrial use but the building is listed – mainly because of the roof structure. She favoured the application for an enhanced Dr's surgery with clinics, integrated community facilities, council services etc. – with the roof made available for people to see. She thought that a housing development was also essential. Cllr Jones agreed with this general idea, Cllr Knowles did not. Mrs Collins thought that while the surgery development wasn't ideal it was a solution to the need to use the land and the building.

Dr Griffiths: Worcester Street practice – they currently work out of 3 houses and are desperate for new premises with up to date facilities. Five years' effort has been expended; they have involved private finance companies in their plans. They feel they need to be in or near the town centre; the old foundry has been the only option to come available. They are very keen to use it and see it as a centre for the community, incorporating health promotion, health links etc – MUCH more than just a traditional surgery. Their 2nd planning application is now in; due at committee in November.

Cllr Knowles: there has been talk about most of these things for years, without any progress being made. Another example is the Old Bank. He believed the licence application was for a restaurant to run until 11.00 pm and then drinks only until 2.00 pm. At that point the Cumulative Impact Order should come into effect but the application will go through unless people object.

Lynda and Les both said that the CIO should prevent the application being successful.

Lynda: the granting of the licence to the re-opening Picture House should lead to a presumption of all other applications failing.

OTHER IDEAS BEING CONSIDERED:

Business Improvement District Facility – whereby business people could be asked to pay a supplementary rate, to be used for marketing, street furniture, security, subsidised parking etc. to upgrade the town centre shopping experience.

Crown centre – this is only at the suggestion stage – the council already pays 80% of the rates on vacant premises. It might be possible for them to offer monthly leases for 50% of the normal rent, these to be available for start-up businesses etc.

Monthly leases would benefit new undertakings in uncertain times and make it possible for quick availability if and when Modus want to start re-development.

Comments: we should aim for a specialism, e.g. like the Hay-on-Wye book shop speciality. Are Modus paying anything at the moment? No.
Are Tesco still wanting the 80,000sq.ft? Not sure.

Wollaston and Kingswinford give a better shopping experience than Stourbridge.
We should give more encouragement to performing arts – they bring people and business.

We need to get the environment right to encourage people and businesses to come here.

JOHN SHEPHERD: STOURBRIDGE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL – see separate sheet for detailed suggestion of an entrance to the Ryemarket being created from the new Aldi store. Ryemarket management has refused to co-operate.

Reference was made to the previous access facility via Boots' Chemist. The project would not need massive funding but would certainly bring great benefit to the Ryemarket and town shops. Regrettably no-one from the Ryemarket management attends the regeneration meetings to listen to public opinion. They are concerned about the loss of a unit – empty units seem more acceptable than using a vacant unit to enhance trade and increase likelihood of uptake of more premises. They also seem to think that a crossing point would be unsafe – a point of view not shared by anyone else. John asked for support in getting past the letting agents.

Lynda asked for anyone who could help to contact John. She would put the issue on her website. Could Hannah Rogers be involved, as Town Centre Manager? She will try to facilitate a meeting with the necessary people.

Les – the council would favour the scheme and would support it if the owners can be persuaded of its good sense.

Cllr Rogers asked if Aldi were in support? Yes, have given support in writing.

Cllr Knowles couldn't see what was in the scheme to benefit Aldi.

JOHN PARRY: reported good public reaction to the new service. They are now running 6 trips per hour giving increased usage and better access to town. They expected 8/900 people per day but it is now up to more than 2000. The fame of the

system is spreading and many areas are now considering using the PPM for branch lines.

The wheels problem which led to a short withdrawal of service has been resolved – a lubrication problem led to flanges wearing down more than anticipated.

Mrs Scott raised concerns that construction lorries exceeding the designated 7.5 tons weight were using the bridge over the railway line on Parkfield Road. Tree growth obscuring signage had been cleared and the police informed.

Can John envisage the PPM going through to the canal basin? That is part of future development plans. John said he would also like to see a stopping point for Red Hill School. The re-opening of the old line would be a real door-opener for Stourbridge to Dudley to Walsall. The cheapness of this type of LPG fuelled transport has to be a major attraction: it costs only £6.00 to run the train from the Town to the Junction stations.

Lynda closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their attendance and participation.

A request was made that a venue with better acoustics should be used – Mr Robins wondered why we couldn't have free use of a room at the Town Hall.

SUBMISSION RECEIVED AFTER MEETING ON 16.10.09

After the meeting we received the following suggestion(s):

We should maximise the town's assets such as Mary Stevens Park e.g. with regular music on the bandstand (See Birmingham's Botanical Gardens for a good example.) Have a good variety of refreshments – tea rooms to burger bars, picnic area etc. Tennis /bowls tournaments.

There should be a calendar of festivals and events through the year which are well advertised and contrasting in appeal.

We need more emphasis on performing arts: we should aim to be famous for something other than drinking. A decent cinema? A big charity event? Do something for Children in Need that would TV coverage?