

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE & LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Economic Development, Culture & Leisure Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 3 February 2015 at 6.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Julie Swan (in the Chair)

Councillors Simon Boshier
Ben Dowling
Hannah Hockaday
Matthew Winnington

1. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

Councillor Hunt had been unwell.

2. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of members' interests.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting - 16 December 2014 (AI 3)

These were agreed as a correct record to be signed by the chair.

4. Review - Revitalising local high streets and secondary shopping centre areas in the city (AI 4)

(a) Witnesses

- (1) Nick Courtney, Fratton Road Traders (a new traders' association)

Nick Courtney as the chair of the new Fratton Traders' Association, which had started in 2014, explained how this had come about with the involvement of Fratton Big Local with only one person attending the first meeting, four attending the second where he was made the chair and by the third meeting in January there were 20 traders. He had gone from shop to shop to invite others as it was hard to get traders to attend evening meetings and had ensured that five councillors had attended. The big concern in the Fratton area for the traders was the anti-social behaviour with security worries by traders with burglaries to their shops and as such it was important to get the police involved in the meetings and they would be attending the fourth meeting of the association on 16 March. The format for the meetings was as a forum with a question and answer session and this one would also be opened up to the public who

used the shops. Other issues that were being raised were parking, cracked pavements, the need to promote the image of Fratton Road and to start planning events there. Nick felt that the selection of shops suffered from a lot of duplication which caused problems for other businesses with a lot of takeaways, hairdressers and barbers.

There was a need to raise the public perception of the area. Social media was also being used to get comments and he felt there was a need to promote the interesting range of shops such as the model shop and an aquarium was now opening that people didn't know about. Traders felt that the road had been severely affected by the impact of a large Asda, with the loss of butchers and greengrocers and they now had their own optician and chemist within the Bridge Centre. It was noted that Asda own a lot of units within the Bridge Centre and it is felt locally that they would not open these to trades that are in competition with them and therefore the business would have to be very different to get an opening such as the new Cuban Beach Café. Another problem was that customers were using the parking at the back of Asda but then didn't go through to the main road.

Nick Courtney was finding Fratton Big Local supportive; they were helping with the admin work and they were also receiving support from the city council which the TA was grateful for. He hoped that in the future there could be a road closure on a Sunday for a food market in the area. In response to questions Nick confirmed that he had approached the centre manager at the Bridge Centre who had also been invited to their TA meetings but they did not wish to get involved. It was suggested that if there was an event for Fratton Road perhaps it could be linked in with St Mary's Church who have May Day celebrations for an event to be held at the same time as this at both venues. The panel congratulated Nick on what he was achieving in the Fratton area.

(2) Paul Gonella, Strong Island

Paul Gonella outlined the problems that this business had found in finding a new venue over a 12-18 month period. He had found they were always too late when a suitable property was identified they had already gone to someone else. He explained that the considerations and the areas they had looked at in the Southsea area as Winter Road and Marmion Road had high rents and they had found an opening at Highland Road where they had opened premises on 15 November. Part of the attraction there was that there were other interesting businesses. They had linked in with the jeweller opposite that would have some studio space available and there was café space at the cycle shop. They hoped they would attract other businesses into the area like had happened in Osborne Road.

Strong Island also had the picture framers next to them that the local artists use and ensured that their exhibition space was used in a way that people were also aware of the framers. Members welcomed the opening of new exciting businesses in Highland Road which was hoped would help revitalise this area which did have vacant units.

The panel noted that this business had a strong local brand. Part of the choice of moving to Highland Road was that they wished to stay in Southsea as they knew from their customers that 80% were based there and so people would now be able to walk to pick up orders. There were also two parking spaces at the front with one hour waiting that people could use and he was hoping that they could attract more cyclists if there was more cycle provision which was being discussed with the city council. Jenny Catlow of Albert Road Traders welcomed the expansion of types of business as Albert Road itself was adjacent and suffered from having too many barbers and hairdressers that were competing for business with each other and there was a need to provide choice along these roads. The panel was aware that it was difficult to stop this competition as the legal/planning system did not identify between retail types. Councillor Swan as chair reported that the Minister for High Streets would be sending an official to meet with her and Barry Walker later in the week to look at the secondary shopping areas.

(3) Jon Spencer, Chair of Portsmouth Cycle Forum

Portsmouth Cycle Forum over 3-6 months had developed their cycling strategy "A City to Share" which outlined the benefits of cycling to the health and economy of Portsmouth residents. He noted that the secondary shopping areas were all on A or B classified roads which had 30 mph limits. These roads function not only as shopping streets but also as residential streets and major through routes. These different modes of use are not complementary. Much more consideration needs to be given to the public realm in high streets to make them places people choose to spend time rather than visiting one shop and then leaving again as soon as possible.

He himself found it hard to find safe routes across the city especially when giving consideration to children. The city's high driver numbers had a knock-on effect on air quality levels making it unpleasant to spend time on busy shopping streets. There should be consideration to what the areas were to become and to encourage people to spend time in the shopping areas. The main through route from Fratton to Hilsea experienced the highest levels of cycle accidents. He supported the suggestion by Nick Courtney to take the traffic out of the

main road for a day for an event there so people see what was really there.

The panel noted the difficulties with travelling through cities for cyclists where there were not cycle lanes and the difficulties for cyclists to have safe places to dismount. Jenny Catlow had previously mentioned within wide main roads running parallel to be consideration of more one way systems with spaces for the cyclists at the sides of these. Jon Spencer felt there was a need for a change of attitude for major changes to take place such as in the Netherlands where the cycle lanes had been incorporated within the infrastructure and trade stayed within the big cities. The chair thanked Jon Spencer for his evidence and felt that some of the issues would be passed to the Traffic and Transportation portfolio holder for consideration.

(4) James Roberts, Active Travel Officer from Transport & Environment, PCC

James Roberts responded to some of the points that had been raised within the earlier discussions.

- Road Closures - these could take place and the Transport & Environment Department would look at requests for these and there would be a cost involved.
- Cycle Casualties - whilst he did not have the figures he was aware that these would be high for London Road and in response to this the department were using LSTF monies for improvements for the cyclists there and at Powerscourt Road.
- General Cycle Infrastructural - he reported that there would be some new storage facilities in Highland Road with LSTF being used within the district centres to improve storage for cyclists which would meet DDA standards.
- With regard to the suggestion of making London Road he reported that there would be more cycle infrastructure to be put in their but for a major change to the one way there was a need to consult residents and this could be a costly scheme.
- Suggested cycling and parking enforcement and use of red lines - rather than yellow lines to help enforce parking restrictions it was reported that these were not used in Portsmouth. James reported that enforcement officers were looking at problems when reported such as the parking on yellow lines at Elm Grove and Albert Road. They would be working with the police to do targeted enforcement of parking on the cycle lanes in the spring and asked for persistent offences to be reported to his department. Jon Spencer asked that there be consistent design features so that cyclists were aware of what they

needed to do at the major junctions. With regard to the suggestion that some parking spaces be used for storage of bikes James reported this would need a TRO and support from local residents who usually wish to protect parking spaces. He also stressed the need for cycle storage to be in accessible and visible areas to increase security (James reported that 904 bikes were reported stolen each year in Portsmouth).

(5) Councillor Luke Stubbs as Cabinet Member for Planning, Regeneration & Economic Development (PRED)

Councillor Stubbs had been invited as the relevant portfolio holder and he had the following points to make:

- The secondary shopping areas were not in as much decline as other cities. Whilst he was disappointed that McDonalds had withdrawn from North End, he felt their reason was the need to have a car park which was within their own business model.
- In the current squeezes on council budgets it was unlikely that traders would be able to benefit from lower business rates. He did not feel there was a simple solution, the main way forward being their self-help by traders acting together in associations.
- It was important to have the right shopping mix and magnet stores to increase footfall. Some areas relied on their demographics with Albert Road benefitting from student shopping.
- He was aware of the regard the need to change the planning policy as shops could be converted into flats and shops to cafés without the need for planning permission.
- Some smaller supermarkets such as Tesco Express could consolidate local centres and increase footfall.
- The Local Plan stated that where there was a demonstrable shortage another shop could open.

The chair thanked Councillor Stubbs for his remarks and agreed that it was important for the traders to work together and share best practice.

(6) Stephen Baily, Head of City Development & Cultural Services - Culture on the High Street

Stephen Baily explained that the move to bring culture to the high street (as outlined in his report to a previous meeting) was being explored with certain areas of the city being under-represented in accessing the museum service and their service wished to build on their outreach work. He wished to identify a unit in Allaway Avenue to use for museum space and to be a community repository as part of the museum's work on Dickens

and World War I. He also felt it was important to look at the siting of libraries in the north of the city. They wished to submit a Heritage Lottery Fund bid when a suitable space was available for this to be developed further. This was welcomed by the panel and it was noted that residents who were not on Portsea Island often felt disenfranchised and it would be good to have access or tickets for big events such as Festival of the Sea, Victorious etc which would also reduce unnecessary journeys into the city centre. Satellite offices of the city council would help assist with the regeneration of areas. It was noted that Cosham Library was now being used for registration of allotments and the mobile library was visiting Drayton so there was a further opportunity to use this service on a wider basis. Councillor Swan would have dialogue with Councillor Symes as the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure & Sport regarding these exciting ideas.

(b) Written Evidence

(1) Void Properties

The schedule prepared by Ed Woodhouse was circulated with the agenda papers and showed that around 4% of Portsmouth's retail property is currently empty comparing to around 10% of industrial property and 18.5% of office property.

(2) Planning De-regulation

Information provided by Claire Upton-Brown, the City Development Manager was noted by the panel regarded the new permitted development measures which have de-regulated the planning system.

In the last few years central government has introduced in a number of new 'permitted development' measures which have deregulated the planning system. These include allowing offices to convert to residential dwellings without needing planning permission and introducing a 'temporary use' option which allows most types of properties to convert to A1 (shop), A2 (financial services) and A3 (restaurant/cafes) Uses for a period of two years without requiring planning permission.

The LGA has been campaigning against these changes and believes that councils should be provided with powers to set out permitted development rights locally, subject to consultation and a local impact assessment. The LGA has also been pushing for payday lenders and betting shops to be taken out of the A2 (financial services) Use Class Order, and put into their own category, so as to give local councils greater controls over the proliferation of these types of businesses.

(3) Feedback from Telephone Conference with Penny Mordaunt MP

A telephone conference had taken place between Penny Mordaunt MP, Minister for High Streets and the chair, Councillor Swan and Vice-Chair, Councillor Winnington on 23 January draft notes of which were circulated pending confirmation by her office. A query was made to the figure quoted regarding the North End traders seeing reduced footfall as it was felt the figure was not representative of the whole area.

(4) Tony Broome, Cosham Trader - His previously submitted comments were as follows:

"EVENTS

Monday is the busiest day in Cosham due to the visiting market, the busiest days of the year are the Christmas light switch on, the farmers market days and the community days all of which are vital to Cosham. We lost the farmers market this year again so any help the council can provide to aid its return would be good plus any more events the council can help to provide would be good, quality street performers, differing types of market.

PARKING

We understand the council needs the revenue from parking but high parking fees infuriate people. The free parking for 1 hour has been fantastic to Cosham and we would need this to stay in place and even be extended to include the whole of the High street, along with better enforcement to prevent people taking advantage.

MAINTENANCE

The recent improvements to Cosham have been very well received by the vast majority of people, however more needs to be done replacement of the pavements being the most obvious."

Councillor Swan closed the meeting, thanking everyone for their contributions to a very useful meeting.

5. Date of next meeting (AI 5)

An informal meeting would be held on 26 February for members of the panel only to consider their draft report.

The meeting concluded at 8.00 pm.

Councillor Julie Swan
Chair