

# **POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

## **14 JANUARY 2013**

*Present :-* Councillor Julie Young (Chairman)  
Councillors Mark Cable, Nigel Chapman, Barrie Cook,  
Mark Cory and Jo Hayes

*Substitute Member :-* Councillor Richard Martin  
for Councillor Margaret Fairley-Crowe

### **20. Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings of the Panel held on 5 and 20 November 2012 were confirmed as correct records.

### **21. Invited Guests**

The Chairman welcomed four guests who had been invited to the meeting in order to broaden the Panel's discussion on Town Centre Issues:

- Hugo Fenwick, Director at Fenwick Ltd, representing Williams and Griffin Ltd;
- Alan Lindsay, Essex County Council Principal Area Transportation Co-coordinator;
- Ron Levy on behalf of CORBA, representing the Walls Project;
- Graham Carrington, Chairman of the Castle Neighbourhood action Panel
- Cassandra Clements representing Colchester Borough Council's Zone Teams;
- Jane Knowles, Head of School at Colchester Institute

### **22. Better Town Centre Programme // Update**

Councillor Quince attended and, with the consent of the Chairman addressed the Panel. He referred to the latest King Sturges retail study of Colchester Town Centre. He acknowledged that the study had concluded that Colchester remained a strong retail centre however he was concerned that things had deteriorated since then and he was of the view that it was essential to future success for Town Centre Management to be established. He acknowledged that progress was being made but he felt that this was piecemeal and investment was insufficient.

Mr Nick Chilvers addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). He considered that Colchester did fare better than most other neighbouring town centres as currently it was difficult to secure investment in retail space. The Vineyard Gate development looked promising but he was of the view that it would draw custom away from the High Street which was, in any event, suffering from a disproportionate number of cafes and bars. He agreed that there had been small improvements such as the Walls Project and proposals for improved lighting but he suggested that the Market needed to be made more visually attractive and drinking in public near in the St Botolph's area needed to be restricted. He felt the town should be

made more car friendly and planning policies should provide for the development of a cinema at Tollgate along the lines of Freeport, Braintree.

Gareth Mitchell, Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration, presented a report on the Better Town Centre Programme which had been launched in 2010 to improve communication and coordination across the many and varied activities and projects in Colchester town centre. The programme was also created in recognition of the fact that helping the Town Centre to flourish in challenging times would require co-coordinated action. As such it was a cross-council initiative delivered in partnership with Essex County Council based on nine themes:

- Improving Colchester for You and Your Family
- Creating Quality Public Places and Spaces
- Bringing New Buildings and Street Scenes
- Supporting Business and Retailers
- Making it easier to get to and around Colchester
- Promoting Colchester
- New Things to See, Do and Visit
- Ensuring Clean, Safe Places and Spaces
- Changing Colchester after Dark

A “Better Town Centre” brand and website had been created as well as a Better Town Centre Steering Group which met monthly and was made up of officers from across Colchester Borough Council and colleagues from the Highways and Transportation and Economic Growth teams at Essex County Council. The panel was provided with details of the various projects and initiatives which had been co-coordinated by the Group.

In addition, as part of the natural development of the Better Town Centre approach, the Better Town Centre Plan – Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been developed, consulted upon and adopted. The Plan was intended to provide a guiding framework for the achievement of the Council’s town centre aspirations. In keeping with the Better Town Centre approach, the Better Town Centre Plan SPD provided detailed guidance on the delivery of the vision set out in the Core Strategy for the future direction of Colchester’s town centre. It provides a holistic approach to the reinvigoration of spaces, uses and activity in Colchester’s historic centre during the day, evening and at night that will ensure its continued vitality in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century context of economic challenges, climate change and new ways of spending leisure time.

The Plan, which had been adopted in December 2012, proposed four main inter-linked themes based on policy, consultation responses and discussion of objectives at the Town Centre Steering Group:

- Sustainability
- Activity
- Heritage and Design
- Movement

Gareth Mitchell, assisted by Fiona Duhamel, Regeneration and Estates Manager; Karen Turnbull, Enterprise and Tourism Development Officer; Laura Chase, Planning

Policy Manager and Howard Davies, Town Centre Project Manager responded to questions and discussion on the following issues:

- The current status regarding the St Botolph's Quarter and Vineyard Gate and future aspirations for these areas
- The facilities at the new Bus Station in terms of its function as a destination
- The potential role of a Town Centre Manager, the previous Business Improvement District and the critical need for support from the business community
- The continued un-occupancy of St Nicholas House and the negative impact this has on the street scene
- Recent retail developments at Turner Rise Retail Park and the Council's out of town policies
- The difference between the primary and secondary retail areas of the town centre which provided for different ratios of bars and cafes with shops
- The impact of internet shopping on the role of the town centre generally and the need to retain vitality by encouraging use of the town centre in different ways
- Future potential to deliver innovative projects including a new lighting strategy and provision for 'living streets'

The Chairman invited each of the guests in turn to address the Panel on the issues from their organisation's perspective.

Hugo Fenwick presented details of the development proposals for Williams and Griffin which he had previously presented to Councillors in December. He explained his view that the triangle of Williams and Griffin, Debenhams and Marks and Spencer worked well but was concerned about the impact of Culver Street but felt their development proposals would address these issues. He referred to Colchester's ranking in retail studies and the importance of working with the Council and businesses to bring more to the town and to contribute to its regeneration. He anticipated that the redevelopment of Williams and Griffin would be completed in 2017 and he was hopeful that a major new anchor store would then see the benefit of locating in the High Street. He mentioned the examples of good town centre management such as demonstrated in Canterbury with funds from businesses and the Council. He was keen to seek opportunities to increase and improve the linkages between the High Street and Culver Street particularly in view of the disappointing nature of the existing 'lanes' which would benefit from more glazing and more shop units with better lighting. He was supportive of greater pedestrianisation to improve the dignity and elegance of the High Street and to increase opportunities for al fresco dining.

Mr Fenwick responded to a number of questions from members of the Panel, in particular in relation to:

- The impact of internet shopping on town centres generally and the companies' plans for the future development of Williams and Griffin's internet presence
- The mechanisms available to improve access from Culver Street, the urban realm generally and the potential shift in foot fall with the future development of Vineyard Gate
- The potential for Williams and Griffin to use social networking linked with specific events.

Cassandra Clements presented to the Panel on the environmental challenges facing the new Zone Teams, rather than their specific priorities. In particular the problems presented by litter and graffiti, the damage caused to street furniture during the night times and incidences of fly tipping. Zone working had provided for three wardens and one sweeper dedicated to the town centre and the Zone Team had been successful in receiving four stars following their entry in the Cleaner Britain awards

Mrs Clements responded to a number of questions from members of the Panel, in particular in relation to:

- A suggestion to hold a 'no ifs, no butts' litter campaign
- The success of securing attendance by litter picking offenders at an information / awareness seminar
- The practices adopted in other countries to encourage responsible attitudes to litter
- The success of the Junior Wardens initiative in St Andrews ward in providing information to young people about their rights and responsibilities
- The impact of the night time economy on the disproportionate amount of litter dropped on Friday and Saturday nights and the possibility of holding an action event at night time to impact on the situation

Graham Carrington explained to the Panel that the Neighbourhood Action Panels had been set up to help local residents resolve problems of anti social behaviour and crime and to see how to guide the correct agency to resolve the problems identified. In his experience he had found that it was essential to get residents involved at an early stage and to hold representatives responsible for the things they had agreed to do. For the future he was looking to secure the involvement of planners and developers in considering the wider implications of proposals for residents.

Ron Levy explained to the Panel that the Walls Project which he was now involved with was the most exciting initiative he had been involved since coming to Colchester 27 years ago. He had been inspired to become involved by Karen Turnbull and the response from the businesses had been phenomenal and had led to the forming of a working group of volunteers from local businesses. The route of The Lanes was the backbone of the town with the highest concentration of independent and medium size retailers. The council was providing assistance to secure funding to meet set up costs. The concept, which could potentially involve the installation of archways, special street furniture and lighting, had already proved very successful in both Norwich and Brighton. Mr Levy also took the opportunity to mention his concerns about the impact of traffic management measures in the High Street and the problem for smaller businesses who might not be in a position to change delivery times to before 10am when the measures were due to commence each day.

Alan Lindsay explained to the Panel that 180 responses to the consultation on the proposal had been received. The grounds of some of the representations had triggered the need for a public enquiry. It had therefore been proposed that an experimental scheme be introduced for 12 month period following a trial period of 6 months to gauge the effects and to respond to the issues raised. Essex County

Council was working with the Borough to implement this proposal as soon as possible although an implementation date had yet to be agreed. He further indicated that the County Council was open to engagement with the council and others in the town centre over the proposal and it was intended to form a working group of various interested parties including local businesses, residents, disability groups to discuss the performance of the scheme. He was hopeful that the scheme would be able to be monitored very carefully.

In response to questions from the panel members, Mr Lindsay explained that the traffic reduction measures were being formulated to address traffic problems in the town centre and to create an improved environment, including such things as ad hoc dining to make Colchester as attractive a town centre as it possibly can be. He acknowledged that many representations had been submitted in relation to the continued permitted use for motorcycles but this was as a consequence of the existing bus lane policy. He considered that the provision of a 20mph speed limit would assist with this perceived problem. The issue of displaced traffic at a number of locations, including Brook Street, had been looked at. There were options for re routing of traffic and the situation would continue to be monitored during the implementation of the trial. In relation to the persisting problem of air pollution in the Brook Street area, he confirmed that Essex County Council, in its capacity as highway authority, was working with Colchester Borough Council, as responsible authority in respect of air pollution, to improve the issues collaboratively.

Jayne Knowles explained to the Panel that she was involved with a number of projects at the Sheepen Road site and at Braintree. Also at the Minories she had assisted with a post graduate MA programme as well as public exhibitions to enhance people's lives. She was keen for the town to develop and for the creative arts to be encouraged in the context of a vibrant town centre. The fact that the arts could contribute to the regeneration of an area had been well documented and in this context she was a member of the St Botolph's Quarter Project Group involving the creative triangle of visual arts provision in town in the form of the Minories, Firstsite and 15 Queen Street. There was a frustration at the lack of speed of creative ideas and the challenge was how best to manage this. She was looking at catalysts which would support these initiatives and working with people empowered to move projects forward. She had visited Utrecht, the largest arts university in the Netherlands, where creative entrepreneurship was feeding into the post graduate course in Creative Economies. Her other interests included the Creative Colchester Action Plan and the Waiting Room Project.

*RESOLVED* that –

- (i) All the guests be thanked for their valuable contributions to the meeting
- (ii) The progress with the Better Town Centre Programme over the last two years and the connections between the work of the programme and other related town centre issues be noted with particular emphasis being placed on the following:
  - The Canterbury model of Town Centre Management
  - The inspiring work associated with the Lanes Project and the upgrade of lighting

- and signage in the area
- Introduction of litter picking work in lieu of littering fines
  - Continued night time litter enforcement involving outside agencies
  - Forthcoming work with the local community on the High Street traffic management proposals
  - The importance of the role of the arts in providing job opportunities and assisting regeneration

### **23. Work Programme 2012/13**

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Corporate Management giving details of the Panel's current work programme. The programme has been updated since the previous meeting of the Panel to reflect the decisions that were made and current circumstances.

The Panel was scheduled to discuss rural related issues at its meeting in February 2013 and the Panel was asked to provide suggestion issues for consideration at that meeting

*RESOLVED* that –

- (i) The contents of the report and the current situation regarding the work programme be noted.
- (ii) The following issues be included for discussion at the next meeting of the Panel:
  - Broadband
  - Transport
  - Isolation issues for younger and for older people