

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL

28 FEBRUARY 2011

Present :- Councillor Nigel Offen (Chairman)
Councillors Margaret Fisher, Mike Hardy, Michael Lilley
and Lesley Scott-Boutell

Substitute Member :- Councillor Sue Lissimore for Councillor Nigel Chapman

Also in Attendance :- Councillor Lyn Barton

22. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2010 were confirmed as a correct record.

23. Historic Town Centre Improvements

The Panel considered a report by the Head of Strategic Policy and Regeneration giving an update on the Historic Town Centre Improvement Project which formed part of the Better Town Centre Programme.

Howard Davies, Town Centre Project Manager and Fiona Duhamel, Regeneration Programme Manager presented to the Panel a background report explaining that the Better Town Centre Programme, which had been launched in March 2010, brought together a number of current and future projects under nine key themes:

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

The themes had significant cross over and following discussions across the Council's services and with Essex County Council, a Steering Group had been set up to monitor projects within the themes and risks to the programme and to ensure sufficient engagement opportunities were developed with the public and key stakeholders.

A number of key projects sat within the nine themes such as development of a new hotel and Creative Business Centre in the St Botolph's Quarter, the new Magistrates' Court, improving Town Station square, Greyfriars boutique hotel, successful implementation of Christmas lights, working with businesses around more reasonable parking charges, improved access works to the Priory, improved public realm works in Lion Walk, new working arrangements for town centre street cleaning and waste collection, task and finish group for the town centre evening economy, the round Britain

cycle race, creative kiosks in the bus station waiting room, work on improving the night time economy through the Purple Flag status and the town centre traffic and transport improvements.

A month long engagement period had been provided in October 2010 which included:

- A stakeholder event;
- A week long exhibition;
- Over 530 people attended the exhibition;
- An online questionnaire was launched;
- 193 responses, with 90 additional emails.

In addition the following groups had been individually consulted:

- Bus operators;
- Hackney Carriage Association;
- CoRBA;
- Access groups;
- Age Concern;
- Lion Walk Retail;
- Culver Square Retail;
- Federation of Small Businesses;
- Individual small business operators;
- Hotel operators;
- Residents from the Dutch Quarter, Roman Road and Priory Street.

It was explained that the detailed Phase 1 work has been produced in partnership with Essex County Council using consultants Mouchel, focusing on works to reduce unnecessary traffic in the town centre, improve reliability of public transport, enhance pedestrian priority and improve cycle access.

The scheme proposed:

- A bus gate at the bottom of North Hill, operating all day every day only allowing buses, taxis, motorcycles and cycles to travel north to south along its entire length;
- No right turn into the High Street from Head Street between 10am and 6pm, other than for buses, taxis, motorcycles and cycles;
- A bus gate at the eastern end of the High Street into Queen Street only allowing buses, taxis, motorcycles and cycles to improve late night pedestrian safety and prevent a rat run circuit in the evenings and mobile parking during the day;
- No entry at any time into the Dutch Quarter from the High Street, access to be from St. Peter's Street;
- Relocation of existing accessible parking from the High Street to other locations;
- Current High Street taxi rank reduced in size to enable a wider pedestrian space;
- A larger all day taxi rank in Head Street allowing provision to be shared around the town centre;
- Improved High Street Bus Stops. The improvements will enable buses to manoeuvre in and out without the need to protrude into the highway;
- An improved and larger bus stop in Queen Street as part of the hotel development;
- A longer term vision for a new bus facility in the Stanwell Street/Osborne Street area.

Feedback on the proposed traffic and transport plans had been positive with over 77%

of people expecting a positive impact or no change. Nevertheless, there had been issues of concern relating to changes to the accessible parking in the High Street and changes to business delivery times.

Investigations had been undertaken in relation to alternative accessible parking in the Town Hall car park and in Priory Street and other options were being looked at including working with NCP to develop opportunities at Nunns Road car park and increasing the number of spaces in Vineyard Street car park which would involve improvements to the existing lift.

In terms of the concerns from retailers regarding the proposed changes to the delivery times, officers had and would continue discussions with CoRBA and individual businesses.

It was proposed that implementation of the improvements to High Street bus stops would take place in the spring and the changes to traffic flows and vehicle access would be undertaken in the summer.

In respect of the wider Better Town Centre Programme, work on key projects was continuing with a further public engagement event planned with the likelihood that this could focus on the proposals to gain Purple Flag Status in Colchester (an accreditation linked to improvements in the night time economy).

The Panel discussed the topics raised in the report and gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- The level of responses to the consultation and whether it was deemed to be significant;
- The need for young people's views to be taken into account, by using social network as a mechanism to obtain comments;
- Details of the work being undertaken to the lift from Vineyard Street car park to make it more reliable / resistant to abuse;
- The potential for negotiations to be undertaken with Culver Square retailers to secure the use of lift facilities to Culver Square;
- The likely timescale for the Vineyard Gate development to come on board;
- Details in connection with the Purple Flag initiative;
- The plans in place for the former bus depot.

Councillor Barton, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Sustainability, attended the meeting and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel explaining that developers had been unwilling to commit to the Vineyard Gate development in the current economic situation but that good progress had been made with the boutique hotel and she was hopeful that a Creative Hub would be a very impressive outcome for this area of the town centre.

RESOLVED that the significant progress with the Better Town Centre Programme and the feedback from the engagement event undertaken in October / November 2010 be noted.

24. Colchester Cycle Town Project

Mr Phil Allen addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1), in opposition to the proposal to change the Lower Castle Park riverside walk into a shared cycle / pedestrian route. He was of the view that the walk was currently a safe walking environment for residents and visitors of all age groups and believed that if it was opened to cyclists there would be no control as to how and by whom it was used. He felt that there were a number of alternative routes available to cyclists and urged the Panel members to oppose any change in designation of paths within the Castle Park.

Ms Paula Whitney addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1), in opposition to the introduction of the cycle route currently being constructed in Crouch Street. This route had not been included in the original proposals and she was of the view that National Cycle Route 1 was well used and had been designed well so that people could see where it travelled. The route currently being constructed had been poorly planned and ought to have been routed behind the Tesco store to prevent conflict with pedestrians.

Paul Wilkinson, Transportation Policy Manager explained that a decision on the paths in Castle Park had not yet been made. The Castle Park consultation exercise was due to close at the end of that week. The responses would be looked at and reviewed and from which a report would emerge.

Mark Eves, Cycle Town Programme Manager explained that he was aware of the issues in relation to National Cycle Route 1 but the new route along Crouch Street was part of proposals to develop access both into and through the town centre. This was part of a Strategy formulated in 2008 to widen the cycle route network. He was of the view that it would be very difficult to encourage cyclists to use a route to the rear of the Tesco store and part of the reasoning was to encourage more people to travel past the Crouch Street shop frontages.

The Panel received a presentation by Paul Wilkinson on the Colchester Town Centre Project.

The presentation covered:

- Cycling and its links to the Strategic Plan;
- The reasons why people choose to cycle and the changes to enable these choices;
- The background behind Colchester being one of only 18 towns to secure Cycle Town status;
- The budget of £4.2m, made up of funds from Cycle England and match funding;
- The partnership was made up of Essex County Council, Colchester Borough Council, Sustrans and CTC, Colchester Cycling Campaign, Colchester2020 LSP, National Express East Anglia;
- The strategy centred on improved access, training and communication,
- Progress had been made in terms of improved infrastructure and routes from Highwoods, the Garrison, the railway station, Greenstead and Lexden, various marketing, promotion and training events

- Various options for the future were outlined.

The Panel discussed the topics raised in the report and gave particular consideration to the following issues:-

- An indication of what currently constituted a cycle route;
- The potential to continue to deliver Bikeability courses, in particular those to Level 3 standard, suitable for older children and adults;
- The work being undertaken to encourage cycle routes against the flow of vehicular traffic;
- The work being undertaken to discourage the use of headphones by cyclists;
- The potential to improve connections for cyclists from outlying areas such as Rowhedge and West Mersea;
- The benefits and dis-benefits of shared paths and the need for all use to be courteous and for pedestrians to take priority;
- The need for good quality cycle networks to be direct, pleasant and traffic free.

RESOLVED that Paul Wilkinson be thanked for his informative presentation.

25. Work Programme 2010/2011

The Panel considered a report from the Head of Corporate Management setting out the current situation regarding the Panel's work programme for 2010/11.

The Panel had completed a number of very important tasks and received presentations on very interesting and stimulating subjects. It remained only for the work connected with the Task and Finish Groups relating to Waste Prevention and Recycling Options Appraisal and Older People's Accommodation to be commenced as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that the contents of the work programme for 2010/11 be noted.