

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
29TH MARCH 2004**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Shepherd)
The Vice-chair (Councillor Tormey)
Councillors Cowles, Hubbard, Slater, Sutherland, Taylor and
Williams

APOLOGIES: Councillors Bentley, Duffin, K. Jones and Lewis

80. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 12th January and 2nd February 2004 were confirmed and signed.

81. DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Tormey disclosed a personal interest as an employee of Fearon Hall in respect of the item "Revenue Monitoring 2003/04".

82. DECLARATIONS – THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations of the existence of the Party Whip were made.

PART 2 (DELEGATED)

83. TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT

In accordance with the Committee's work programme, a report of the Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration outlining Town Centre management issues, including markets and Loughborough November Fair was submitted. The Director of Community Engagement and the Town Centre Manager attended the meeting to assist with the consideration of the item.

In accordance with a request of the Committee, Mr Simons and Mr & Mrs Bradley of the Market Traders Federation attended the meeting and took part in consideration of the matter.

Mr Simons stated that parking in the town centre continued to be a problem for market traders. Vehicles used by traders were often too large to park in the various multi-storey car parks. It was increasingly difficult to find places to park, particularly on Saturdays as car parks were quickly filled. The considerable number of visitors brought to the town by the University caused additional parking problems. Other local authorities in the region provided allocated spaces for traders and gave concessionary or free parking. In Loughborough, traders received no allocated spaces or concessions and that was of concern.

The following issues were raised and comments made by members of the Committee:

- (i) It would be difficult to justify concessionary charges for market traders as the public who came to town to purchase goods from the market paid to use town centre car parks. Staff employed in various retail outlets in the town centre also received no concessions. The charging policy needed to be consistent.
- (ii) It was acknowledged that because of the size of vehicles it was difficult for market traders to find appropriate places to park in the town centre and it was essential that the situation was addressed and options were considered to improve the situation.
- (iii) The issue of the use of volunteers at the November Fair should be considered. It would be of interest to know who the volunteers were, in what capacity they were used and what insurance provisions were made.
- (iv) It was of concern that if volunteers were no longer available to assist with the organisation and management of the Fair then the event might no longer be able to take place.
- (v) The use of the word “volunteer” was misleading and required clarification.
- (vi) The issue of access to the town centre for all members of the community was important. The terminology in the report was ambiguous and required clarification.
- (vii) Loughborough was trying to compete with larger centres and it was essential that appropriate training was offered to businesses and their staff to ensure that Loughborough could be appropriately marketed. The East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) should be involved in any training programmes.
- (viii) Marketing the town centre was a key issue. Loughborough continued to move away from its previous image as a market town. As the population continued to rise and new developments including The Rushes retail development were built it was essential that the town centre was marketed appropriately to ensure that the loss of trade to the three major cities locally was reduced. The town centre had to be vibrant and ideally have a unique selling point which would encourage visitors to the area.
- (ix) The retail market provided a valuable service to the public and attracted people to the town centre. It would be appropriate to consider the possibility of extending the market to allow increased space between stalls. The condition of the stalls should be checked regularly to ensure that high standards and safety were maintained.
- (x) Sales from town centre retail outlets continued to grow above the national average and it would be of interest to know if retail market sales reflected that trend and what influenced sales generally.

- (xi) It was of concern that problems had occurred in 2003 in respect of the festive illuminations due to a number of wall failures and it was hoped that the situation would be resolved before the decorations were required in 2004.
- (xii) It was essential that liaison continued with local communities in respect of the festive illuminations to ensure that religious festivals were celebrated appropriately.
- (xiii) Access into The Rushes car park was a growing concern. Vehicles were continually parked on one of the two lane access roads and that caused traffic congestion on the public highway.
- (xiv) The use of Beehive Lane car park for the Shopmobility Service was not ideal due to access issues. The possibility of seeking an alternative location in the town centre should be considered.

In response to issues raised and comments made, Mr Simons and Mr Bradley stated:

- (a) The market attracted a considerable number of people to the Town Centre. It was reliable and the public were accustomed to its presence twice a week. In respect of the infrastructure some stalls were in a poor condition and required refurbishment.
- (b) The development of the Farmers Market had been a cause for concern for the retail market traders. Initially the market had been established, following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease to help farmers to sell their own produce. Increasingly that had not occurred and traders were selling produce which was also sold on the retail market.
- (c) The development of the new shopping centre and the subsequent closure of Woolworths in the town centre had resulted in a reduction in trade. The recent climatic changes had also had a detrimental effect on sales.
- (d) It was unfortunate that the market received very little publicity in the local press. It was hoped that whenever the town centre was featured reference to the market could be made.

In response to issues raised, comments made and questions, officers stated:

- (a) In respect of car parking charges market traders were treated in the same way as other town centre businesses. It would be difficult to justify giving a concession to one specific group and not another.
- (b) The problem of access for market trader vehicles in the town centre was of concern and should be addressed. It would be appropriate to consider options to improve the current situation and report back to the Committee.

- (c) The management of the November Fair was considerable and had placed a strain upon staff resources. In recent years senior Council officers from various services had provided help with the management of the Fair on a voluntary basis. That arrangement was not ideal as it was not a permanent solution. Currently there was no additional budget for the voluntary arrangements or training for officers involved. It would be appropriate to review those arrangements and to consider allocating a budget for training.
- (d) The whole of Loughborough town centre, including the market, should be fully accessible to all members of the community. Under the Disability Discrimination legislation a minimum standard of accessibility was required, although it was hoped that, through the Town Centre Management (TCM) strategy, a higher standard would be attained.
- (e) Currently there were no specific business development training courses being offered by the Council. Involvement of external partnerships, including the local Chamber of Trade and EMDA would be encouraged. It was envisaged that if training was provided it would be self-funded through participating businesses.
- (f) A two day consultation event on Loughborough Town Centre had taken place in February 2004. During the consultation period issues including the management and co-ordination of the town centre and open spaces through a partnership with local businesses were considered. The consultation had sought to consider the overall experience people felt when visiting the town centre. The issues raised had been reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 25th March 2004 when it had considered the Loughborough Town Centre Strategy interim report.
- (g) The status of Loughborough as a market town had been raised during the consultation event. Although Loughborough was a town with a retail market, changes to the infrastructure of the town had occurred, so that Loughborough was no longer considered to be a market town.
- (h) In a recent report by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) a market town was defined as having a population of between 3,000 to 30,000 people and the population of Loughborough exceeded that number. The retail market performed an important function but it formed only part of the Town Centre Strategy. It was essential that Loughborough created opportunities for development and continued to retain expenditure within the town centre. During the consultation process the consensus had been that although growth was to be encouraged it was essential that high standards of growth were achieved in respect of accessibility, cleanliness and safety.
- (i) Loughborough town centre continued to grow at a higher rate than the national average. However, growth was polarised, the original development of The Shires retail development in Leicester had resulted in a significant fall in sales in Loughborough. Sales in the town centre subsequently improved but the three major cities locally were continually improving their services and Loughborough found it increasingly difficult to sustain its share of the market.

- (j) It was difficult to encourage large retail outlets to locate in town centres such as Loughborough. Large chains had requirements in respect of socio-economic makeup and if a centre did not meet those requirements they would not locate in that area. It was hoped that by providing physical opportunities in respect of available sites retail outlets would be encouraged to be represented in the town.
- (k) The market provided an important service and it was essential that there was investment in it. The public wanted reassurance that it would remain a permanent feature and it was envisaged that, through streamlining procedures, the market could be run in an even more efficient way. The Farmers Market had been established to assist local farmers in the area and to encourage different people to use the market.
- (l) A number of issues had been raised during consideration of the item and it would be appropriate to have regard to those issues when the Loughborough Town Centre Strategy was considered at the joint meeting between the Committee and the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 26th May 2004. Preparation of the Strategy was still underway and it was too early to identify answers to the questions raised.
- (m) Problems with the festive illuminations had occurred in 2004 as a number of buildings had been certified unsuitable to house the wall mountings. Cabinet had agreed a sum of £15,000 in the Capital Programme to identify if remedial work could be undertaken to rectify the problem.
- (n) The Rushes car park was part of a private retail development and came under the remit of the site manager. The issue of vehicles parking on the entrance road could be raised with him. Progress in respect of the development could be programmed for future consideration if the Committee considered it to be appropriate.
- (o) The refurbishment programme for Loughborough Town Hall had resulted in the relocation of the Shopmobility Service. Cabinet had agreed that it should be relocated to the Beehive Lane Car Park. Although that site was not ideal, a risk assessment of the car park had been undertaken and recommendations for improvements had been made.
- (p) The issue of car parking for market traders' vehicles should be addressed and it would be appropriate to consider options to improve the current situation.

RESOLVED

1. that the current position be noted;
2. that Mr Simons and Mr & Mrs Bradley be thanked for attending the meeting and contributing to the Committee's consideration of the matter;

3. that the issue of car parking arrangements for market traders be programmed for future consideration by the Committee;
4. that the other issues be considered in conjunction with the future consideration of the Loughborough Town Centre Strategy at the joint meeting with the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 26th May 2004.

84. REVENUE MONITORING 2003/04

In accordance with the Committee's work programme, a report of the Head of Financial Services outlining the actual expenditure and income of the Service Development Plans within the Committee's scrutiny remit compared with the profiled budgets as at the end of period 10 (end January 2004) was submitted. The report illustrated "controllable" expenditure and, therefore, excluded internal recharges. Brief reasons for variances were included.

The Group Accountant attended the meeting to assist with the consideration of the item. She stated that the original budget for 2004/05 and the revised budget for 2003/04 had been approved by the Cabinet on 12th February 2004. There was an overall underspending of 9% at the end of period 10 but it was envisaged that the overall position at the end of period 12 would be more balanced.

The following issues were raised and comments made by members of the Committee:

- (i) It was of concern that there appeared to be an underspending in respect of the promotion of tourism within the Borough and it would be of interest to know what promotional measures were currently being undertaken.
- (ii) The higher rental income received from industrial sites was encouraging. However, it would be of interest to know why rental income from the Ark Business Centre was less than the budget.
- (iii) There was an underspending on salaries for Loughborough Town Hall and Sports Development and it would be of interest to know if those savings were due to the current managed vacancy savings.

In response to issues raised and questions, officers stated:

- (a) The budget for promotional leaflets and signs for tourism had been spent. The underspending outlined in the report had resulted from the initial profiling.
- (b) Following consultation with the Ark Budget Officer it would appear that the budget for the Ark had been set at an unrealistic figure. Projected occupancy figures had been set unrealistically high and that had resulted in a shortfall in projected rental income.
- (c) It would be appropriate to provide the Committee with details of the estimated figures compared to the actual figures for 2003/04. Comparative figures in respect of the Oak Business Centre could also be outlined.

- (d) There appeared to be a significant overspending in respect of the South Charnwood Swimming Pool budget. It was envisaged that the overspending would be significantly reduced at the year end following an amendment to the contribution made by Leicestershire County Council of £5,800.
- (e) The underspending on salaries had not resulted from Managed Vacancy Savings. Underspending on salaries for Leisure and Sports Development had been offset by charges to a different budget, although an underspending had still occurred. The revised budget would not be amended at out-turn as the outstanding costs for external coaches would be taken from the revised budget.
- (f) The overspending in respect of festive illuminations had resulted from costs related to uninsured damage to commercial properties in 2003 because of problems with some of the fixings which had previously been considered by the Committee.
- (g) It was expected that by the end of the financial year the overall position would be more balanced.

RESOLVED

- 1. that the current position be noted;
- 2. that further information regarding the budgets and occupancy levels for the Ark and Oak Business Centres be forwarded to members of the Committee for their information.

85. CABINET – CURRENT/RECENT ISSUES CONSIDERED AND RESPONSES TO REPORTS/COMMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE

Details of the items within the Committee’s overview and scrutiny remit which the Cabinet had considered at its meetings on 12th and 26th February and 17th March 2004 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the issues considered by the Cabinet be noted.

86. SCRUTINY COMMISSION FEEDBACK

The Chair reported on the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on 10th February 2004. He stated that the Commission had agreed to consider the work programmes of the various scrutiny committees and to recommend to each scrutiny committee key topics to be scrutinised in the future.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

87. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The current Forward Plan had been published on 16th February 2004. An extract from the Plan listing those matters within the Committee’s overview and scrutiny

remit was submitted. It was suggested that the Committee might wish to review those issues to decide whether any should be included in its work programme.

A member of the Committee stated that it would be appropriate to programme the Green Spaces Strategy and Action Plan for consideration in conjunction with the report on Play Facility and Open Space provision to be considered on 7th June 2004.

RESOLVED that the issue of the Green Spaces Strategy and Action Plan be programmed for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee on 7th June 2004.

88. WORK PROGRAMME

The current position with the Committee's work programme was submitted. The Committee was asked to consider the programme, any amendments and additions it might wish to make and business for future meetings. That would enable planning for the next two or three meetings to be undertaken, for relevant background information to be prepared and for the attendance of officers and/or others to be arranged.

The following issues were raised and comments made by members of the Committee:

- (i) It would be appropriate to receive information in respect of car parking arrangements for market traders at the joint meeting with the Environment Scrutiny Committee when the issue of the Loughborough Town Centre Strategy would be considered.
- (ii) It would be appropriate to consider issues related to the supervision and management arrangements for the Loughborough November Fair prior to the 2004 event.
- (iii) It would be appropriate for the Committee to be aware of issues relating to the management of The Rushes retail development in Loughborough in the context of the Town Centre Strategy.
- (iv) The refurbishment of the wet-side area of the Charnwood Leisure Centre would be a significant undertaking and it would be appropriate for the Committee to monitor the proposals.
- (v) Hathern Parish Council had recently received a grant to establish a community bus service which offered transport to people who had previously experienced difficulties in using regular bus services. It was essential that villages throughout the Borough were made aware that grants were available and the promotion of the service should be investigated.

In response to issues raised, comments made and questions, officers stated:

- (a) Although the Council was not responsible for The Rushes retail development, as it was a private development, if there were issues which were of concern to the Committee it would be appropriate to invite a representative to attend a future meeting to discuss issues raised by the Committee.

- (b) Issues related to transport came within the remit of the Environment Scrutiny Committee and that Committee could be asked to consider issues related to the development of the community bus service when it next considered public transport issues.

RESOLVED

1. that information in respect of car parking arrangements for market traders be submitted to the joint meeting with the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 26th May 2004 when the issue of the Loughborough Town Centre Strategy would be considered;
2. that a report on issues related to the supervision and management of the Loughborough November Fair be programmed for consideration in September 2004;
3. that a report on issues related to the Charnwood Leisure Centre wet-side refurbishment be programmed for future consideration;
4. that a report on issues related to The Rushes retail development be programmed for future consideration;
5. that the Environment Scrutiny Committee be made aware of the Committee's interest in respect of the community bus scheme operating in Hathern and request that that Committee consider including the issue within its work programme for future consideration;
6. that the Committee proceeds on the basis of the following work programme, which incorporates decisions taken earlier in the meeting:

Issue	Progress	Meeting Date
Loughborough Town Centre Strategy	<p>Report requested on issues related to the item identified from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.</p> <p>Issue to be considered in conjunction with the Parks, Open Spaces and Wildlife Strategy at a joint meeting with the Environment Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Information in respect of car parking arrangements for market traders be submitted for consideration to that meeting.</p>	26th May 2004
Play Facility/Open	An update report on the findings	

Issue	Progress	Meeting Date
Space Provision	<p>of the Working Party set up to investigate 29 play areas in Loughborough considered 2nd February 2004. 11 of the 18 areas had been considered.</p> <p>Cabinet Lead Member for Leisure Services attended meeting.</p> <p>Investigations to continue on further 18 areas and a report to be submitted to the Committee on those findings.</p> <p>The draft Open Space Strategy to be submitted to the Committee when available.</p>	7th June 2004
Green Spaces Strategy and Action Plan (including Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan)	Report requested on issues related to the item identified from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.	7th June 2004
Soar Valley Leisure Centre	<p>Report to be submitted to the Cabinet on 15th April 2004 outlining contract specifications and the Sports Development Programme.</p> <p>Committee to be updated on the progress of the development.</p>	7th June 2004
“Leisure and Cultural Opportunities for All”- Best Value Improvement Plan	Report requested on a six monthly basis to monitor progress of the Plan. Last considered 2nd February 2004.	20th September 2004
Loughborough November Fair	<p>Report on Town Centre Management considered 29th March 2004.</p> <p>Report on issues related to the supervision/management of the November Fair requested.</p>	20th September 2004
Performance Indicator Information	To be reported on a half yearly basis. Last considered 2nd February 2004.	To be programmed
Allsopps Lane Amenity Area	Committee updated on the progress of the investigative study on 2nd February 2004.	To be programmed

Issue	Progress	Meeting Date
	Committee to continue to be updated.	
Charnwood Leisure Centre Wet-Side Refurbishment	Issue identified for future consideration.	To be programmed
The Rushes Retail Development, Loughborough	Issues related to the development identified for future consideration.	To be programmed

CDS\53