

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PROFORMA**

Cabinet Meeting .....25th October 2007

1. Title of Item/Report

Stockton Town Centre

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a report that sought approval for additional work and consultation focusing upon Stockton Town Centre.

At Cabinet on 30th November 2006 Gillespies' Riverside Sites Masterplan was agreed as a basis for a Stockton Town Centre Action Plan. This Action Plan was approved for consultation purposes, setting out the vision for the regeneration of Stockton Town Centre, the gateways into the centre and its adjoining riverside sites.

It was explained that since then significant progress had been made in shaping many of the regeneration aspirations for the centre. Members were provided with a summary of these:-

- partnership working with Lathe Investments had resulted in the granting of planning permission for a new foodstore at the Southern Gateway,
- property acquisition had commenced as part of site assembly for the Southern Gateway,
- substantial investment had been made in improvements and a re-launch of the market,
- plans and funding had been secured for the future re-use of the Shambles,
- improvements to public realm had kickstarted the shaping of a Cultural Quarter in the town centre,
- partnership working with the owner had resulted in the marketing of the Globe Theatre building,
- discussions had taken place about the potential of a "World Mile Project" linking the town centre with housing regeneration taking place at Parkfield, and
- liaison with Licensing and Planning regarding policies and provision of outdoor cafes.

Cabinet subsequently approved a report on 30th August 2007

which sought to amend the Action Plan to reflect changed circumstances and comments received as part of an exhaustive consultation process undertaken. It was noted that the amendments had now been incorporated into the Action Plan which would continue to be reviewed on a regular basis.

It was advised that one of the common themes throughout the comments received was a concern that there were not enough proposals for the regeneration of the High Street itself. Many were very supportive of the gateway and riverside proposals. People requested changes to the quality and mix of the retail offer in the High Street, as well as improvements to public realm and the markets

Consultants were jointly engaged in April 2007 to embark on a joint retail study for both Stockton and Middlesbrough Boroughs. It was explained that the purpose of the study was for consultants to examine the potential for collaborative working to address future retail needs to be met through the Local Development Frameworks and various regeneration initiatives. Given that independent retail studies had previously been commissioned across the two Boroughs, a decision was being taken to use the same two consultants (White Young Green at Middlesbrough and Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners at Stockton) in a joint manner.

Members were advised that progress was now well advanced on the joint study with a final report expected by the end of November 2007. The study specifically examined the future need for additional retail growth across the 2 boroughs, advising on how potential growth should be accommodated and phased without adversely impacting on existing centres.

It was explained that findings to date from retail modelling based on the household surveys required to establish up to date shopping patterns, had revealed that Stockton Town Centre was some way behind Middlesbrough Town Centre in terms of comparison shopping and that this would continue. The reasons for this were numerous but the success of the nearby Teesside Retail Park should be highlighted as one of the main contributors towards the consistently high vacancy rate experienced in Stockton Town Centre (circa 22% over the past 5 years).

The study identified limited future capacity for new comparison shopping in Stockton based largely on current market share, whereas Middlesbrough appeared to have more capacity than available sites with which to accommodate future development. It was noted that as a consequence, the extension to Middlesbrough Town Centre to include Canon Park was proposed through its Local Development Framework.

It was explained that conversely, significantly more growth for convenience retailing was identified in Stockton as opposed to Middlesbrough. This was due largely the number of foodstores in Stockton Borough. It was expected that the spare capacity would be met by the provision of new stores in Stockton and Billingham Town Centres in the next few years.

It was recognised that Middlesbrough was identified as a sub-regional Major Town Centre in the retail hierarchy established by the Tees Valley Structure Plan, whereas Stockton, whilst categorised as a Town Centre, lay in a tier below Middlesbrough's classification. It was explained that to this effect, Middlesbrough should be allowed to grow and meet future demand for mainstream comparison shopping. Members were advised that even if this was prevented and re-directed towards Stockton it was unlikely that demand amongst operators would exist in the short to medium term.

It was noted that Stockton had a distinct role in the Tees Valley retail market and this needed to be built upon and expanded. The Town Centre and Riversides Sites Action Plan set out many ambitious and exciting complementary regeneration initiatives designed to attract people to the wider town centre for non-retailing purposes i.e. capitalising on Stockton's excellent riverside setting for events, leisure and urban living, however, it was considered that a further study was needed to identify a series of measures that would refresh Stockton's retail offer, attractiveness to operators, shoppers and visitors alike and complete the continually improving "experience" of coming to Stockton Town Centre.

It was explained that the refreshed vision would need to respect the roles of other centres in the Tees Valley, seeking to develop further a distinctive offer in a complementary rather than a competitive manner. A focus on retail specialism would be crucial if Stockton was to succeed in the future and to this effect it was proposed that an assessment of demand for retail space be undertaken with local letting agents as the first part of the study. It was noted that it was essential to market test different forms of retailing if a new role alongside the "market town" offer was to be established. Members were advised that the market, the historic fabric of the centre and the increasing diversity of the centre were to be retained and interwoven into the study so that a sustainable, vibrant and exciting town centre experience could be supported. This would involve a detailed urban design assessment of the centre, a radical review of parking and other transport issues and an awareness of all the other proposals and initiatives set out in the Action Plan. It was noted that a common theme throughout the proposals was one of improving the overall quality of development and the environment of these areas.

It was explained that whilst it was recognised that a detailed brief would need to be prepared for what amounted to be a major piece of work, it was necessary to note that there was previous work upon which to base a study. An excellent understanding of the local and sub-regional picture would assist in that process and rather than going for numerous quotations from consultants to undertake this study, it was proposed that given their previous involvements in earlier retail studies for Stockton as well as the current joint study with White Young Green, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) be appointed to undertake this study. Members were advised that NLP had displayed an excellent recognition and understanding of the local issues as well as the technical capacity work being undertaken. It was noted that an agreement regarding the cost of the study would need to be achieved and value for money demonstrated as part of procurement.

Members requested that once the study had been finalised an all Member seminar be held.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The commissioning of further work and consultation regarding Stockton Town Centre, as detailed within the report, be agreed.
2. On completion of the study, described in the report, an all Member seminar be held in order to present and consider its findings.

3. Reasons for the Decision

To assist in the regeneration of Stockton Town Centre.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

None

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By no later than midnight on Friday 2nd November 2007

Proper Officer  
29 October 2007