

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting1st October 2009

1. Title of Item/Report

Billingham Town Centre

2. Record of the Decision

Details were provided to Cabinet of an update regarding the masterplanning for Billingham Town Centre regeneration.

In January 2007, Cabinet agreed to sell the freehold of Billingham Town Centre, and Kingsway car parks, to Halladale (now Stockland UK) to enable a major redevelopment and reinvestment of the town centre. The sale signified an important step forward, looking to resolve the issues that multiple ownership had posed over the previous years, in bringing about a comprehensive regeneration scheme. As part of the conditions of sale, Stockland was obliged to address several of the top priorities highlighted by the residents and businesses of Billingham in the consultation exercises carried out in 2005 in future masterplans for the Town Centre. Since the sale, Stockland had been consulting with potential supermarket operators and other national and local retailers and businesses to determine their needs, which were being used to form the basis of their masterplanning exercise. Due to the current economy and market forces; and in particular the property investment climate, this process had understandably slowed.

Stockland had since tabled a draft masterplan based on a phased approach and its key elements include refurbishing the Town Centre to attract new retailers alongside the creation of new anchors to encourage pedestrian flow throughout the town. Stockland had also agreed terms to create a refurbished large retail unit at the former Kwik Save/1 East Precinct/Resource Centre/Town Centre MOT Testing site. Whilst this proposed development is outside the main masterplanning exercise it would improve the linkages between the Forum and the Town Centre. Stockland were currently in negotiations with a national retailer regarding this unit and in order to assist in the regeneration of the Town Centre it has been agreed that this development can come forward as a separate planning application, anticipated to be by the end of December 2009.

The draft masterplan is based on the principle of forming a major anchor

in part of the West Precinct, which would be suitable for a national foodstore operator. In addition, the existing ASDA unit would be retained (and possibly expanded) and a fourth anchor store would be created opposite the former Kwik Save building. The remainder of the Town Centre would benefit from significant refurbishment to attract new retailers and create an attractive environment. Details of the refurbishment proposals were still under consideration by Stockland, following feedback from officers these may include new cladding, new shop fronts and feature lighting.

Positive negotiations with several national retailers regarding potential leases of the four anchor stores was also taking place. Grainger Games had recently opened (47 Queensway) in the Town Centre. Additionally, the Queensway Dental Practice had also taken the opportunity to expand their successful business into former residential flats adjacent to their existing premises and to a substantial area within Crown Buildings opposite their practice.

The sale agreement provided that the Council and Stockland would endeavour to agree the draft scheme for the regeneration of the Town Centre before 26th July 2009 (being two years from the completion of the sale). However, given the current financial climate Stockland had requested a 9 month extension to agree the draft scheme and officers were currently in the process of agreeing this. A consultation / public engagement event was likely to be held in November 2009; the planning of which was now underway.

It was noted that Council officers continued to work closely with Stockland to ensure that there were no major technical issues upon submission of their masterplan and to ensure that the masterplan acknowledges and builds upon the other Council initiatives around the Town Centre. Namely these initiatives include the £15M enhanced refurbishment of Billingham Forum, due for completion in January 2011 and the £0.5M investment to significantly upgrade John Whitehead Park. Additionally, subject to bid approval, the Town Centre would also be benefiting from a £35M (PFI credits) Integrated Health & Social Care facility.

To date, a working group has been formed to address all outstanding highway, urban design and planning issues, alongside potential solutions. Key issues that Council officers were working with Stockland to resolve included the provision of sufficient good quality car parking, the need to ensure that there were adequate vehicular and pedestrian routes to the Town Centre and that the current national cycle routes were maintained. Future improvement to public transport provision was also being addressed, alongside the requirement for a new taxi rank and traffic

calming.

Detailed proposals of the refurbishment materials and (hard and soft) landscaping had also been sought and discussions were being held regarding the Council's anticipated requirements in relation to any potential section 106 agreement. Officers were keen to ensure the public realm provision outside Billingham Forum reflected both the Town Centre regeneration and improvements to the Forum.

In November 2009, Stockland was expected to consult and engage with the people of Billingham regarding their plans, in particular regarding the urban/public realm element of their proposed scheme which would focus on street furniture and materials. A draft consultation action plan had been forwarded to Stockland advising them who to engage with, what mechanisms best to use to consult and a proposed timeline in terms of sequence of consultation. The information hub in the glazed entrance to Billingham Art Gallery would be utilised to showcase updates on the Town Centre scheme (plans, timescales, etc) once the masterplan had been agreed.

In the meantime, officers were endeavouring to improve the current appearance of the Town Centre by addressing the exterior of some of empty units through 'retail window dressing' in partnership with Stockland. The introduction of generic and bespoke graphics to the local shopping environment could be significantly improved during the pre-regeneration period. Additionally, officers have strongly recommended that Stockland pro-actively promote the Town Centre, its current offer, and new developments with regular press releases to the media and updates to the Billingham Partnership and Town Council as appropriate.

Members noted comments made by the Managing Director of Stockland, confirming his company's commitment to investing in the town centre and consultation with the community. Cabinet was encouraged by this but expressed frustration at the delays in Stockland undertaking any meaningful engagement with the public. Members asked that officers relay this to Stockland and explain the uncertainty the lack of engagement caused within the community.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and Cabinet's comments relating to public engagement be relayed to Stockland.

3. Reasons for the Decision

Billingham Town Centre is a key Town Centre in the Borough. It is vital that a proposal for regeneration is decided upon, and that public consultation is undertaken in relation to it.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

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

By Midnight, Friday, 9th October 2009

Proper Officer
05 June 2009