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## KIRKLEES COUNCIL

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

**Thursday 20 September 2012**

Present: Councillor Sims (Chair)  
Councillor Marchington  
Councillor Preest  
Councillor Rowling,  
Jane Gledhill (Co-optee)  
Tim Duke (Co-optee)

In attendance: Andrew Jackson Principal Project Manager  
Paul Kemp Commercial Manager  
Barry Reynolds Principal Development Manager  
Beth Hewitt Scrutiny Officer  
Councillor McBride

Apologies: Councillor Holroyd-Doveton,  
Councillor Lees-Hamilton  
Ian Brierley (Co-optee)  
Kiran Bali (West Yorkshire Police Authority Representative)

**1 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2012 were approved as a correct record.

**2 Interests**

No interests were declared.

**3 Admission of the Public**

The Panel considered the question of the admission of the public and agreed that all agenda items would be considered in public session.

**4 Huddersfield and Dewsbury Town Centres - Current Activities and Issues**

The Commercial Manager, Paul Kemp and officers from the Investment and Regeneration team outlined the current activities and issues taking place in town centres across Kirklees.

Challenges and Strategic Context

Each town centre had its own distinct challenges and barriers but also had the ingredients and opportunities to enhance the overall offer within Kirklees. The strategic importance of Dewsbury and Huddersfield town centres was reflected in the Local Development Framework (LDF) and the Kirklees Integrated Investment Strategy (KIS). Both town centres in

Kirklees face similar challenges in respect of their offer. Including; the impact of current economic conditions, a lack of large available sites for office and commercial offers and a desire to encourage greater residential presence in or close to the town centres.

### Huddersfield

Huddersfield has a strong set of existing partners, including the University of Huddersfield, Kirklees College, Greenhead College and significant levels of commercial and office occupancy. Area action plans for Huddersfield town centre have grown out of consultations carried out in 2009/2010. The action plans set out the vision for the town over the next 20 years.

Parts of Huddersfield are recognised as having specific uses for example; King Street is the centre of evening entertainment. High Street houses a lot of Council services and St George's Square is a major event space as well as a public transport hub, via the train station. Outcomes of the consultation endorsed the establishment of 8 character areas. These areas would re-affirm the importance of each space e.g. retail, university areas, residential.

### Dewsbury

Dewsbury benefits from Kirklees College, but due to the colleges location its interaction with the town centre is limited. Dewsbury has good transport links and is better connected with the M1 Motorway.

A vision for Dewsbury town centre has been developed and agreed with Cabinet Members and local Councillors and the integrated investment strategy and Dewsbury Renaissance master plan provide a strategic context for Council led activity in the town centre. The Council is focused on delivering Dewsbury as a vibrant market town that is:

- A place for young people and families to spend their time
- A vibrant evening economy
- A place for new business opportunities
- A place for development of residential opportunities in the town centre

### **Good Practice and Ideas for Change**

Good practice and ideas have been sought from other local authorities including Bury and Stockport for their markets and town centres. Nottingham for the retail offer, public transport and event management and Oldham for the recent tram extension.

An event called Shape Huddersfield brought together over 70 interested parties to discuss the future of Huddersfield Town Centre. The ideas from this session included making better use of the town centre space, having a

place to ponder and sit in the local community and having local trails and activities to highlight the historical significance of some of the buildings in Huddersfield.

The Scrutiny Panel made a number of comments about ideas and improvements for town centres in Kirklees including;

- That there was no major attraction to bring people into the town centre
- That there could be a trail and route around the town centre starting from the train station taking people to the places of significance around the town.
- Having a food hall and highlighting the Huddersfield architecture around the town.

The Cabinet Member for Place, Councillor Peter McBride, extended an offer to the Scrutiny Panel Members to visit other local authority town centres - in order that scrutiny could have input into how town centres were shaped in and around Kirklees in the future.

#### **Action**

(1) That the Scrutiny Officer would liaise with Scrutiny Panel Members to arrange the visits to town centres.

#### **Developing an offer**

The internet has changed people's buying habits, impacting on how consumers use town centres and there was also a desire from national retailers to acquire units with larger shop floors. The Council is working hard to safeguard the existing retail offer and to ensure a consistent level of employment to support the range and quality on offer.

A key objective in town centres is to increase the numbers of people living in or close to town centres, by converting redundant commercial/retail space in to residential properties, whilst not compromising the core retail offer. The Government's Empty Clusters initiative is assisting property owners to bring empty and obsolete commercial properties back into residential use.

#### Dewsbury

Officers have been working with landlords to re-brand and re-model the Princess of Wales precinct including involvement from local schools to help produce a brand. The Dewsbury Shop Front Improvement Grant Scheme has contributed towards improving the visual appearance of 9 units on Long Causeway to assist in improving shopper experience. There has also been a £4.5 million refurbishment of the market.

### Huddersfield

Officers are working with major landlords in the town centre to assist in developing proposals for Kingsgate, Packhorse Centre and the Piazza.

The former Kirklees Music School was converted to student accommodation in 2011. This marked a change of emphasis for student accommodation and a number of applications and enquiries to convert other premises in or adjacent to Huddersfield town centre into student accommodation have increased.

### **Improving the Environment**

The attractiveness and appearance of town centre as well as improving the streetscape has a bearing on a town centres success and ability to encourage more people to attend events and places of leisure.

### Dewsbury

Heritage Lottery funding has been secured to develop work to bring empty properties back into use. There is also an Enforcement and Heritage Protection Strategy and fund to improve the physical and visual appearance of targeted buildings within and adjacent to Dewsbury Town Centre and key gateways.

The Council acquired Pioneer House through a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) working to bring the building to a good standard of repair, whilst preserving the key heritage features of the building. Repairs to the fabric of the building should be complete by December 2012. Usage of Pioneer House could include offices, tenants and retail opportunities.

### Huddersfield

The owners of the Piazza, Packhorse Centre and Kingsgate are working through plans to enhance the retail offer as well as considering contribution to the streetscape of the town centre.

### **Accessibility and Connectivity**

#### Dewsbury

A number of activities have taken place in Dewsbury to improve accessibility and connectivity.

- Including; extending greenway networks,
- Improving crossing facilities from the Dewsbury Minster to the town centre for pedestrians and cyclists,
- Ongoing use of the Free Town Bus (now carrying in excess of 380,000 passengers)
- A concessionary voucher parking scheme in Cliffe Street car park.

## Huddersfield

The focus on connectivity in Huddersfield has been between Westgate, Kirkgate, Peel Street and High Street. The free town bus continues to provide a service connecting areas within the town.

Councillor McBride highlighted the positive benefits of the electrification of the Trans Pennine route from Leeds to Manchester, which would cut down on travelling time considerably, and therefore attract more people into the town centres.

### **Ideas for Change**

The Council has secured funding to assist property owners bring empty and obsolete commercial properties into residential use. The Council will be helping these property owners and it is hoped that the project will bring forward 125 residential units.

The Council has been working to engage the public around the future of Pioneer House allowing people to look around the building and see its current conditions and to manage the expectation of the public. Groups of local creative businesses and artists in Dewsbury are developing proposals for a new cinema in the town.

Councillor Sims thanked officers for attending and providing the information to the Development and Environment Scrutiny Panel.

### **5 Feedback from Lead Member Briefings and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Updates**

Councillor Andrew Marchington provided an update to the Development and Environment Panel on his recent attendance at the Police and Crime Panel. He highlighted that this had been an opportunity for Kirklees Scrutiny to have input into how the relationship between the Police and Crime Panel and the Scrutiny Committee would work.

### **6 Town Centres Project Planning**

The Development and Environment Panel Members stated that they would scope out the project in more detail following their visits to the other local authority town centres.

### **7 Dates of Future Panel Meetings**

Panel noted the dates of future panel meetings.