

ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

HAVERHILL AREA WORKING PARTY

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 15 March 2012 at 4.15 pm
in the Seminar Room, Castle Manor Business and Enterprise College, Eastern
Avenue, Haverhill**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs K D Richardson (Chairman)
Councillors Ager, Ms Byrne, Clifton-Brown (substituting for
Mrs Rushbrook), French, Mrs Gower, Marks, McManus and Redhead

BY INVITATION: Will Austin, Clerk to Haverhill Town Council
Luke Barber, Highways Section, Suffolk County Council
Sam Cliff, Highways Section, Suffolk County Council
Debbie Kemp, Kent Business School, University of Kent

48. Substitutes

The following substitution was declared:-

Councillor Clifton-Brown substituting for Councillor Rushbrook.

49. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rushbrook and
A Whittaker, and from Haverhill Town Councillor Pat Hanlon.

50. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2012 was confirmed as a correct
record and signed by the Chairman.

51. Declaration of Interests

Members' declarations of interests are recorded under the item to which the
declaration relates.

52. 'Destination Haverhill': Shopper Survey Results

The Working Party received and noted Report C399 (previously circulated) which
provided an update on the results of the 'Destination Haverhill' Shopper Survey.

On 26 January 2012, the Working Party had noted that following the allocation of
£40,000 total funding provided by the Borough Council, Suffolk County Council and Kent
Business School's (KBS) Innovation Fund, the 'Destination Haverhill' Shopper Survey
was undertaken by KBS between 24 November 2011 and 2 December 2011. A total of
538 surveys had been received, which was considered to be an acceptable number for
analysis. Debbie Kemp had been appointed by KBS as Project Manager for the project
and she was in attendance to provide a presentation on the initial findings of the
survey.

The findings had indicated that Haverhill was a town with potential; it had good
accessibility, a high number of car parking spaces, partial pedestrianisation and low
shop vacancy rates. However, Members noted that the poor range of shops was the
biggest singular issue faced by the town centre. The mix of shops was inadequate with
an over domination of takeaways, betting shops and charity shops. National retailers
were tending to contract rather than expand in the current economic climate and

therefore a compelling incentive scheme would need to be considered to encourage new stores to open.

Customer service was considered by the majority of respondents as being average and in the current competitive climate, it was acknowledged that this needed to be improved to attract and keep customers. KBS had formulated several recommendations following their initial analysis during Phase One of the project, including:-

- (a) offering more product choice locally for shoppers;
- (b) current independent shops needed encouragement to 'up their game';
- (c) adhering to the principles of a market town and create a meeting place where the community could come together;
- (d) improving the visual appeal of the town centre;
- (e) encouraging restaurants to open in the centre of the town; and
- (f) providing more positive marketing and publicity.

The Working Party noted the main priorities for Phase Two aimed to improve the performance of current retailers. This would include identifying Key Performance Indicators regarding for example, stock availability, waiting times etc; and organising Master Classes to address the training needs identified by the retailers themselves. Also this work would include the identification of individuals/businesses that could provide under-represented products/services to improve the retail mix.

The Working Party noted the findings with interest and supported the encouragement of attracting larger retailers to Haverhill. However, Members acknowledged that one of the principal reasons for new retailers being reluctant to come and why existing retailers were leaving the town centre, was due to the charging of what were considered to be, high business rates. These were currently set by central Government.

A detailed discussion was also held on attempts to engage landlords with the Council to consider options for improving the range and mix of shops in the town centre.

The Chairman then invited members of the public in attendance to ask questions of Ms Kemp, to which these were duly responded.

(Councillor Redhead arrived during the consideration of this item.)

53. Haverhill High Street Improvement Scheme: Consultation Results and Detailed Design Progress Report

(Councillors French, Mrs Gower and Marks declared personal interests as Members of Suffolk County Council. Councillor French also declared a personal interest as a Blue Badge Holder and all three Members remained in the meeting for the consideration of this item.)

The Working Party considered Report C400 (previously circulated) which sought approval for the current design for improving the Market Hill area contained in the Haverhill High Street Improvement Scheme. This area was located between Swan Lane and Quakers Lane. The Report also provided details on the outcomes of the consultation on the proposed design and the Traffic Regulation Order required to deliver the overall objectives of the scheme.

On 27 April 2011, the Cabinet approved the Terms of Reference for the High Street Improvement Scheme (minute 155 (3) referred), which included delegating

authority to the Haverhill Area Working Party for managing the total £750,000 budget for the Scheme and approving the final project design.

Officers from Suffolk County Council's (SCC) Highways Section had undertaken a detailed consultation on the proposals, in accordance with the scheme previously approved by the Working Party (18 October 2011: Minute 26 referred). The consultation was in two parts. The first part was general public consultation on the scope of the scheme, design principles and overall appearance; and the second part was statutory consultation on the Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) required to deliver the complete scheme.

Luke Barber and Sam Cliff of SCC's Highways Section provided a presentation to the Working Party in respect of the outcomes of the consultation. Mr Barber firstly reported an amendment to Section 4 of the Report which should have read *'from the former Cleales car park to the Gurteen factory site'* and not *'from Cleales car park to the former Gurteen's factory site'*.

In contrast to the number stated in the Report, 108 questionnaires had been received in response to the consultation. Of these, 64% of respondents agreed that improvements were required in the High Street. In respect of pedestrianisation, respondents for and against pedestrianisation were very close, with a slight majority not supporting pedestrianisation. However, upon analysis of the 'free text' responses to the consultation, the number supporting the pedestrianisation TRO as drafted, declined significantly to 33%. Several respondents answered that Blue Badge Holders needed to be allowed to park in the proposed pedestrianised area, and several others had stated that deliveries would still be required to businesses located in the High Street during the proposed restricted times of the day. In conclusion, the results of the consultation indicated a significant desire for improvements to the High Street; however, a case for pedestrianisation had not been made.

On 18 October 2011, the Working Party had asked that investigations be undertaken into introducing a TRO in Crowlands Road to help ease traffic congestion; however, the analysis of consultation responses had not supported making changes to this road at the present time.

The statutory consultation had highlighted several issues with the proposed pedestrianisation TRO. Mr Barber reported that since the publication of Report C400, 18 legal objections to the TRO had now been received and the majority of concerns were in association with the loss of disabled parking and restricted access for loading/unloading for businesses located in the High Street. Due to the strength of objection, there was a possibility that SCC's Rights of Way Committee would not recommend proceeding with the TRO, as drafted, and therefore SCC would not be able to proceed to a Public Inquiry to finally resolve the objections.

In contrast, the civil engineering design of the scheme had progressed well since its presentation to the Working Party on 18 October 2011, with further attention given to the Market Hill area. The design was purposefully flexible to accommodate several TRO options, ranging from:-

- (a) maintaining the status quo;
- (b) incorporating through 'shared space'; and
- (c) implementing full or part time pedestrianisation.

Given the risk that the proposed TRO would not overcome the legal stages ahead of it, SCC's Highway Design Team had undertaken some preliminary work on an alternative proposal, which was presented at the meeting for consideration by the Working Party. The alternative proposal suggested pedestrianising the section of the High Street between Jubilee Walk and Eden Road. Potentially this section could be

pedestrianised at all times as businesses located in this area appeared to have good rear access. Jubilee Walk itself would be permitted to be opened for vehicular access for Blue Badge Holders and loading/unloading but through traffic would not be permitted. The Working Party noted the advantages of this proposal would be:-

- (a) it would resolve many of the key objections;
- (b) it would reduce the traffic domination of the High Street at all times;
- (c) it would provide an attractive pedestrianised plaza outside the Haverhill Arts Centre; and
- (d) there would be no requirement to carry out peripheral works to Swan Lane signals, the former Cleales car park access etc.

However, the following constraints were also noted:-

- (a) due to weight-bearing considerations, Heavy Goods Vehicle access to the High Street would need to be restricted;
- (b) the utilities plant located in Jubilee Walk and manhole covers would need to be upgraded; and
- (c) the pedestrian link from the High Street to the Leisure Centre would have a limited number of vehicle movements, therefore the implementation of a 'shared space' environment would be required.

This suggestion was not supported by the majority of Members, particularly as Jubilee Walk had been refurbished as a pedestrianised area relatively recently. Members also expressed concern that this alternative would not necessarily overcome the issues raised in the objections lodged to the proposed TRO.

A detailed discussion was held and the majority of Members sympathised with the concerns of the businesses located in the High Street and their requirements for loading/unloading outside the times proposed for pedestrianisation; however, they considered that where possible, rear access to businesses could be used more widely and suitable compromises could be achieved.

Concern was then expressed regarding the current level of illegal parking taking place within the High Street and adjacent roads and in response, Mr Barber stated that the adoption of a new or refreshed TRO would enable better parking enforcement to take place.

In response to a question, the Working Party was informed that due to the considerable number of unresolved issues connected with the proposed TRO, it was unlikely that work would commence until after summer 2012.

As several were in attendance, the Chairman invited each member of the public to ask questions of Mr Barber and to express their concerns to the Working Party, to which these were duly responded. The majority of the members of the public had businesses located within the High Street.

RESOLVED:-

That the current design for the Market Hill area of the Haverhill High Street Improvement Scheme, as outlined in paragraph 6.3 of Report C400, be approved.

(Councillors Mrs Gower and Redhead left the meeting during the consideration of this item. Mr Austin, Clerk to Haverhill Town Council, and Ms Kemp also left the meeting during the consideration of this item.)

54. Special Edition Haverhill 2012 Logo

The Working Party received and noted Paper C401 (previously circulated) which contained an image of the special edition Haverhill 2012 logo.

The Working Party noted that the Haverhill 2012 logo was available free of charge for any organisation or business to use in a not for profit capacity when promoting the town or local events which connected with this special year in Britain. The original Haverhill 'CB9' brand mark, developed in 2006 by the Design Office under contract from the Borough Council, was designed to promote civic pride, a sense of place and a common identity under which to celebrate the town.

Members were informed that the Haverhill 2012 logo could be downloaded from the www.cb9haverhill.co.uk website together with the original brand mark.

(Councillors Ager and Clifton-Brown left the meeting during the consideration of this item.)

55. Dates of Future Meetings

The Working Party confirmed the following dates for future meetings in 2012:-

10 May;
12 July;
6 September; and
15 November.

All dates were Thursdays and the meetings would commence at 4.15 pm.

The meeting concluded at 6.54 pm

**MRS K D RICHARDSON
CHAIRMAN**