

## Runcorn Town Team Minutes Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012

### Attendees

Name	Organisation
<b>Town Team</b>	
Cllr Pauline Sinnott	HBC Mersey Ward Cllr
Cllr John Gerrard	HBC Mersey Ward Cllr
Cllr Norman Plumptre Walsh	HBC Mersey Ward Cllr
Cllr Ron Hignett	HBC Physical Environment Portfolio Holder
Wesley Rourke	Operational Director Economy, Enterprise and Property
Claire Bradbury	Power in Partnership
Kristene Karaski	Cosmopolitan Housing Group (Chester District Housing Association)
Alison Gleave	Halton Voluntary Action / resident
Si Swanick	Resident
Graham Wallace	Runcorn Locks Restoration Society
Gary Shaw	Trader
Maria Tarn	Hazlehurst Craft Studios
Ann Turner Culverhouse	Resident
Rev Vicki Schofield	St Michael & All Angels
Gary Buckles	PCSO
<b>Halton Borough Council Officers</b>	
Jennifer Carr	Regeneration Officer
Gill Watson	Community Development Officer
<b>Neptune Developments</b>	
Steve Parry	Managing Director
Barry Williams	

### Apologies

<b>Town Team</b>	
Reg Eastup	T H Brown Trust
Brian Lunt	Trader
Andy Price	Resident
<b>Halton Borough Council Officers</b>	
Sara Munikwa	Regeneration Manager

## 1. Introductions

Chair, Cllr Norman Plumpton Walsh, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## 2. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

## 3. Presentation

Jenny Carr, Regeneration Officer, gave a short presentation on the Council's regeneration activities in Runcorn Town Centre over the past couple of years.

- In 2011 the Council produced an action plan for Runcorn Town Centre, identifying key sites with potential for development.
- Opportunities were detailed in the Runcorn Prospectus and advertised on the open market in January 2012 inviting expressions of interest.
- The prospectus emphasised the Council's wish to fully engage with the private sector in bringing forward viable, deliverable and sustainable development for the benefit of the wider town centre area
- Sites were split into three phases
  - Phase 1 consisting of 3 sites wholly owned by the Council
    - Crosville Site,
    - Egerton Street
    - Direct Link and temporary car park.
  - Further phases
    - Brindley Mound and Canalside
    - Sprinches Yard and Busway
- Moving forward – Council has two preferred developers
  - **Consolidated Property Group**
    - Crosville Site (Number 1)
    - Solicitors instructed to complete development agreement
    - Out to market to attract occupiers
  - **Neptune Consortium**
    - to support the Council in the medium to longer term regeneration of the wider Runcorn town centre area
    - The Consortium consists of:-
      - Neptune Development Ltd
      - Plus Dane
      - Halton Housing Trust
      - Countryside Properties

## 4. Presentation by Neptune Consortium, the preferred developer to support the Council in the medium to longer term regeneration of the wider Runcorn town centre area

Steve Parry (SP) representing the Neptune Consortium spoke to the group regarding their role and remit working with Halton Borough Council.

The Consortium are picking up the broad range of the regeneration of the Town Centre, therefore, they have teamed up with Halton Housing Trust, Plus Dane and Countryside Properties. The Consortium want to use local knowledge to inform their work.

Neptune Developments are mainly involved in commercial developments such as restaurants, offices, theatres etc. Many of their regeneration projects tend to be brownfield sites, e.g. redevelopment of Queens Square, Liverpool. A recent scheme completed by Neptune is the one at New Brighton. This had seen 16 schemes fail to get off the ground since the 1960's. Their mixed use scheme transformed the area, which is now attracting people and further investment.

Also involved in the refurbishment of Speke Airport and Marriott Hotel, David Lloyd etc. This is an example of how Neptune also work to make the most of existing buildings

Want to use the benefits of Runcorn – physical environment, The Brindley, Canals and listed buildings. Need to find niche for Runcorn and find right uses to attract people in the day and night so it becomes a destination of choice with a different offer.

Opportunity for a set change. Local people feel nothing will change so it's about improving the economic outlook and creating a better environment to live in. The Gateway could go both ways so need to make saw the town centre gets the benefit.

Create an environment to be a destination. Look at whole area together – feels cut off, population of 60/70k on Runcorn side a slight increase in user numbers would have a big impact. New Brighton attracts people from all over the Wirral.

Neptune tend to go back 50-100 years to see what the road system was. Liverpool ONE is an example of how an old road system has been restored. Highways engineers are look at the existing road and pedestrian systems as part of the planning exercise as the town and the nearby railway station do feel cut off. Partners are also looking a range of housing including to buy and to let.

Need to encourage existing businesses to thrive and new to come in. Create confidence in the area and this will attract investment. Also keen to encourage employment for local people. At New Brighton 90% of employees are local to the development. Neptune organised training for interviews to help them during the application process to maximise the number of local people awarded jobs.

A plan was shown (see presentation) illustrating the desire to improve connections in and around the town, especially with the River Mersey. Of the sites identified on the plan, sites 3, 4 and 5 will probably be the sites being looked at early on. Neptune will not be restricting works to sites which are owned by the Council. The Consortium are trying to create a plan to deliver things, it may start in a small way but the aim is to pull everything together.

The consortium has a six month period to look at Runcorn and then produce a plan to articulate their findings.

After Christmas would like to do a workshop session separate to a Town Team meeting about what people believe is needed in the Town. Consultation will lead to a development masterplan followed by a formal consultation event.

Claire Bradbury highlighted that many of the thoughts and ideas discussed at the consultation event in March 2012 were mentioned by SP during his presentation

Gary Shaw (GS) suggested the notes from the consultation and the supporting video which is now on Youtube be shared with Neptune.

**Action:** HBC to share with Neptune the findings from this consultation event and the Portas Pilot application and video to feed into the Consortiums work.

Graeme Wallace (GW) asked if the canal continued passed the expressway would it impact on what is developed on site 4 (Brindley car park)

SP explained Neptune are looking at how delivery could affect an area. There are not many towns with motorway bridges passing through.

Neptune's contact details are:-

Barry Williams - [BarryWilliams@neptunedevelopments.co.uk](mailto:BarryWilliams@neptunedevelopments.co.uk)

Telephone: 0151 293 1010

NPW asked for the Town Team members to go away and think about what they would like to see for the Town.

#### **4. High Street Innovation Fund ideas**

A report detailing findings of research into the suggested initiatives proposed by the Town Team at the previous meeting was shared with the group. Initiatives investigated were:-

1. Shop front renewal grant
2. Business Start-up grant
3. Improved pedestrian signage
4. Free bus service

Two other initiatives were also researched based on the findings of those above:

5. Shop incentives
6. Environmental improvements

Full findings are detailed in the report accompanying these minutes.

WR explained the Council have implemented the Shop Front Grant Scheme in the past using various temporary funding sources. This option represents the HSIF principle of improving quality and fabric of the town. Can test idea and if it does not appear to be working in the short term it can be reviewed.

PS this scheme has potential to be an expensive scheme, the start up grants proposal is smaller values.

WR – this idea was raised by the group, looked in to and feel it is the best way of delivering what was raised. There is no time limit to the funding therefore, the scheme can be reviewed at each meeting if taken forward.

Alison Gleave (AG) asked about the possibility of asking local suppliers to provide a professional deal through the grant scheme.

WR – we can explore this but no two schemes will be the same. Think once we apply process and receive expressions of interest we can see if there's a common area of interest. This would have to be subject to advice from procurement at HBC.

ATC – encourage owners of boarded up properties to invest in them.

NPW – encourage start-ups to use empty properties

GS - Empty properties that need improvements – building on the corner of Regent St and Church St empty 9 years. Private ownership

NPW – La Scala building had to come down for health and safety reasons. Not in a position to force owner to do certain things.

WR – but we can encourage through HSIF to improve quality of their buildings.

SS Application process – applicant getting quotes themselves. Suggest preferred company for them to go to for work. Might help reduce costs.

Regarding the business start-up grant, the new enterprise clubs/allowance to help people wishing to start up their business is available. Long term unemployed to start business can be awarded £1k. There are other potential sources of help e.g. Princes' Trust. The Town Team grant could be match for further applications by the start up to these other sources.

GW suggested any feedback held from previous schemes be shared with potential applicants of the shop front grant to encourage them to invest.

Cllr John Gerrard – ideas 2, 3 and 6 jump out. Realise benefit of business start-up grant. Signage has such a small value it is worth it and also like the potential for another piece of art.

CB asked about the possibility of subsidies to business rates. NPW explained they are nationally set and therefore HBC are not able to alter them.

AG –if we want to encourage diversity could increase the grant percentage for business independents – have priority themes which target niche independent and innovative traders.

ATC – shopping incentives already in action through the recycling scheme and already widely used.

GS - Sherwins has a lot of customers who use this scheme. 15% off a £15 spend. It does encourage people to shop locally.

ATC recommend that if this incentive is taken forward then look at potential to link the two.

NPW – the free service is not the best use of public money

KK – bus service and incentives loss of priority of the HSIF grant. Believe we should concentrate on others.

## **5. Work programme**

WR – things can bring forward quite quickly. Areas where we need more work will be reviewed and presented at next meeting.

Jenny Carr (JC) explained the suggested application process for the shop front grant scheme – this will be done in rounds before Town Team meetings. Application form and supporting documentation will be available on the Town Team webpage. All applicants must obtain 3 quotes and the Town Team will fund up to 50% of lowest quote up to £10,000. The applicant can however pick their own contractor from the 3 presented in the application. There would be a window for applications to be received by before Town Team meetings, submissions to be made by post or to Town Team email address. These will be collated by the Council and then reviewed at the Town Team meeting for a decision by the Town Team as to who is awarded funding.

CB – suggested a few people on the town team review applications rather than do it at Town Team meetings and bring back for ratification.

GW need whole team expertise and knowledge in decision making process.

Standard questions will be on the application form so they can be judged equally.

Non-residential properties are eligible.

KK asked how spend will be monitored? – by WR Team at HBC if the Town Team are happy with this.

Discussion followed regarding payment of works. Agreed that it was to be done in arrears as need to ensure work is carried out according to the grant approval, especially as it involves use of public funds. The Town Team could review payment method in exceptional circumstances if highlighted during the application process. JG made the suggestion that payments are made directly to the contractor rather than through the applicant who is awarded the grant. WR recommend that before a decision on the payment method is made the Town Team wait to see the interest that is generated and the expressions received.

GS asked how it will be promoted

WR – normal press routes main ones being local press, Council website and the Town Team webpage. A mail shot to businesses and property owners in Runcorn on the Council's Business Database will also be made.

JG – benefit from speaking to the CEO of the Halton Chamber of Commerce.

NPW asked for the group to agree that they were happy with the suggested way forward the following incentives be taken forward:-

1. Shop front renewal grant
2. Business Start-up grant
3. Improved pedestrian signage
4. Environmental improvements

SP suggested the idea of a website for the Town Centre be investigated as this could be funded through the money allocated to the shop incentive proposal.

**Action:** HBC to research this idea and feedback at next meeting.

No objections were received.

**Actions:**

- HBC to advertise for applications and expressions of interest for Shop Front grant scheme
- Develop management arrangements for the business start-up scheme to be agreed with Town Team at next meeting
- Arrange for signage improvements to take place.
- Take forward environmental improvements

## **6. Any Other Business**

JG thanked Neptune for their presentation

GW asked that the Town Team be kept informed of Neptune's progress

**Action:** WR to provide update at future Town team meetings.

PS suggested a visit to New Brighton to see what has happened there. Stockton Heath should also be considered for a future visit.

**Action:** Potential visits to be added to agenda of the next meeting

## **7. Next Meeting**

Next meeting will take place on **Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> January at 6pm** at the Boat House, Mersey Road.