

## **ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**26 June, 2013**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Miss P Lewis (Chairman), Councillors Mrs Bloom, Mrs Glover, Hughes (in place of M Smith), Hawkett, Monger, Mordue, Mrs Phipps, Poll, Richards, Mrs Roberts (in place of Lambert), Strachan, Stuchbury and Tyndall.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Mrs Davies, Lambert and M Smith.

### **1. AYLESBURY TOWN CENTRE PLAN**

Members received a report, previously considered by Cabinet on 11 June 2013, on a draft Improvement Plan for Aylesbury Town Centre.

The report had been developed in liaison with Buckinghamshire County Council as a blueprint to help future-proof Aylesbury and to ensure that it continued as a vibrant, prosperous town centre.

The draft Plan recognised that much had been achieved in Aylesbury town over the last few years with significant investment by both public and private sector partners. To date it had weathered the recession reasonably well but the Plan also acknowledged that, like many other towns of its size, Aylesbury was now facing a number of unprecedented challenges which needed shared effort by all stakeholders to successfully address.

Development of the Plan to date had been principally by AVDC and BCC as the two key public sector delivery bodies. However, if the Plan was to act as a framework for all town centre work, broader public and private sector development and ownership of the Plan was essential. The engagement of other key stakeholders such as Aylesbury Town Council, Aylesbury Vale Advantage (AVA), Bucks Business First, Grosvenor Estates (managing agents for Friars Square Shopping Centre) and Aylesbury Vale Estates was an important next step.

There were four key elements to the Plan:

- i) The establishment of seven guiding principles designed to enable partners to collectively and carefully manage the future development of the town centre.
- ii) Identifying a Vision for the town centre i.e. what do we want Aylesbury town to be and be known for, what will be the compelling reasons for people to visit.
- iii) Defining two strategic aims to determine what action should and needs to be taken. These reflect the guiding principles and the vision.
- iv) Setting out an outline Delivery Plan which proposed desired actions for both specific areas of the town and those which apply across the town such as implementing the recently approved public realm guidelines.

In terms of delivery of the actions, some of these were already underway. For example, the development of Waterside North, where a partnership approach had been formed between AVA, AVDC and BCC to progress the development of this site and related areas on a phased basis. Likewise, plans for the improvement of Hale Leys Shopping Centre are being progressed by AVE and Grosvenor Estates were continuing with their investment in Friars Square. Other proposed actions required further detailed work to be carried out and capacity/funding before they could be delivered.

In these instances, Project Groups would be set up with membership drawn from relevant stakeholders to develop the ideas to delivery stage, so that the information was available to enable the most to be made of any funding opportunities which arose.

The Economy and Business Development Scrutiny Committee was then invited to provide feedback on the Plan to the Leader of the Council.

Members were generally supportive of the direction of the Plan but made the following comments to be taken into account when the Plan was considered and enhanced by other stakeholders:-

- The night time economy should be at the forefront of any strategy
- More encouragement should be given to the use of empty offices in the town centre.
- More focus was needed on physical activities.
- Reconsider the effects of the present car parking charges and time constraints.
- Evening transport to and from the rural areas needed to be enhanced.
- Redesign the crossing to the theatre.
- Consideration should be given to investment from abroad and the setting up of a consulting body away from the Local Authority.
- The use of spare land should be given careful scrutiny to determine the best use, be it leisure, shops, restaurants or green space.
- A shop front policy should be included to produce uniformity.
- Careful consideration to be given to the proposals for East West rail which could have a reverse impact and take shoppers away from Aylesbury.
- New shopping technologies needed to be considered and included.
- Expand on the Cycling Town theme and make more use of the proximity to Silverstone.

RESOLVED –

That Members note the contents of the report and endorse the Cabinet support for the Improvement Plan for Aylesbury Town Centre with a recommendation that the comments shown be passed on to the Cabinet Member for Civic Amenities and be considered for inclusion within future stakeholder deliberations.

## **2. ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2013 - 2014**

A Work Programme for the period to end March 2014 was presented for Members approval together with preparation sheets for the identification of key issues to be addressed for each of the Work Topic items.

Confirmation was also given regarding the date for the meeting of a Scrutiny Working Group to consider the direction for any further discussions on the Education/skills issues.

Members' seating positions were also discussed. It was thought that if political groups were mixed it would give a better impression to any attending public.

Following a short discussion it was

**RESOLVED –**

1. That the Work Programme as presented be approved.
2. That the date for the Working Group meeting be agreed as 30 July 2013 at 6.30pm in the Olympic Room, Gateway Offices.
3. That, for the next meeting, Members' seating positions to be arranged around the table so that no political grouping was apparent.