

REPORT TO: Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 17 March 2010

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Environment

SUBJECT: Improvements studies and actions for Victoria Road, Widnes, and Runcorn and Widnes Town Centres

WARDS: Riverside, Kingsway and Mersey

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Board of the results of the study carried out by URBED consultants into the options for the regeneration of the Victoria Road area. The attached appendix details the ideas which have been reviewed, discussed and researched to provide recommendations for future action.
- 1.2 To inform the Board of actions which are being taken, funded by DCLG Grant, in both Widnes and Runcorn Town Centres.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The findings within the attached report are agreed by the Board.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Consultants URBED and partners were appointed in March 2009 to consider options for the future of Victoria Road, Widnes. This study was funded by a WNF allocation. They have subsequently held a series of consultations with local businesses to discuss the ideas which hopefully will lead to the improvement of the Victoria Road area. A representative of Urbed will attend the meeting to present their findings.
- 3.2 The Urbed report (attached as an Appendix) includes three regeneration scenarios for the area:
- Scenario 1 – Modest Capital Budget: This scenario shows the scope for intervention in the absence of major investment. This includes improved parking provision and access but does not solve the issue of the Queens Hall or make improvements to the public realm.
 - Scenario 2 - Maximise Capital Receipt: This scenario describes how significant capital could be generated and re-invested in improvements.

This includes the sale of land in Moor lane to accommodate a new retail unit and the re-development of the Queens Hall site.

- Scenario 3 – Transformational Regeneration: This scenario shows how the area could be transformed via the formation of a “Knowledge Quarter”. This would give the area a clear enterprise role which would take advantage of its close links to surrounding educational, civic and cultural assets. This scenario would include the reconfiguration of the roundabout at the Moor Lane/Kingsway junction to provide land that could be redeveloped to create a new Enterprise Forum. Also, the sale of land currently owned by the council for residential development and the sale of the Queens Hall site to a hotel or leisure operator would bring in funding to make substantial improvements to the area.

3.3 In September 2009 a team of consultants, again led by Urbed, was appointed to look at options for the future of Widnes Town Centre following the anticipated opening of the Widnes Shopping Park. Once more this was funded by a WNF allocation.

3.4. In October 2009 a grant of £53,000 was made available by the Department of Communities and Local Government for improvements to town centres’ retailing. Executive Board Sub, at their meeting on 5th. November 2009, agreed the following allocations of that grant, to be split between Runcorn and Widnes approximately 40% for Widnes and 60% for Runcorn, with a number of the proposed ‘town centre management’ schemes covering both town centres.

- Support for the ongoing promotion of the Shop Local Scheme. Further elements of the existing scheme could be rolled out, including advertising on buses and/or posters in vacant units. £5,000 (10%)
- Support for street cleansing activity as required by the Town Centre Manager, including gum removal or street washing. £5,000 (10%)
- Christmas Music for both town centres, including the installation of the system and all required licenses. £5,000 (10%)
- Support for market events as prioritised by the Market Manager, including one off events to promote the markets, in particular to be co-ordinated with the opening of Widnes Shopping Park. £5000 (10%)
- Contribution towards works required to update the CCTV system in the town centres, to be prioritised by Principal Engineer (Traffic and CCTV). £5,000

Sub-Total £25,000 (47% of total grant) split 50/50 across both town centres.

Proposals for Widnes Town Centre

- Implementation of Victoria Road strategy (to be prioritised and costed) £5000.
- Christmas grotto to be jointly provided with Morrison's and Town Centre Manager. £3,500 with further match funding required.
- £5,000 to fund a community arts group's Community Film Theatre initiative, working with the community to display historic materials and show films collected from the community in a shop unit converted into a 'cinema for a day'; the scheme to be run in conjunction with other events to be held to promote the Town Centre and coincide with the opening of the Widnes Shopping Park in 2010.

Sub-Total £13,500 (26% of total grant)

Proposals for Runcorn Town Centre

- Treatment of empty units, to provide improvements to the paintwork and possibly signage. This is estimated at between £250 and £750 per property. Properties will be prioritised based on the vacancy and condition survey. £5,000 (10%)
- Grant support for other units in poor condition units for property improvements and structural improvements £5,000 (10%).
- An extension of URBED's recommendations for the treatment of empty units to cover Runcorn Town Centre. £5,000 (10%)

Sub-Total £15,000 (29% of total grant)

A final proposal, covering both town centres is to hold a competition for the public to suggest possible improvements. It is suggested that a small prize could be offered, and that £2,000 is set aside to allow the implementation of some of the winning suggestions. This would enable community consultation, particularly via the local press, and would also help to promote the other activities to improve the town centres.

Sub Total £2,000

Total (including programmed over-spend) £59,000

- 3.5 A representative from Urbed will update the Board on progress on their elements of these schemes.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The works described are a part of the 'Urban Renewal Strategic Review and Action Plan 2006-2010'. Information contained within the report attached should inform future policy.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 **Financial Implications:** all of the work described has been funded by external grant support. There are consequently no financial implications for the Council.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Improvements to this area would facilitate improved access to learning and employment opportunities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Suggested proposals could help future generations to have the right skills to take advantage of future employment opportunities.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Creation of learning and employment opportunities would help to support a healthier community.

6.3 A Safer Halton

Public realm improvements would make these areas easier and safer to access.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Improvements to these areas will contribute to Urban Renewal priorities by developing exciting places and spaces to develop business growth.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 Not applicable

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Not applicable

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 9.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.