

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

KILMARNOCK CENTRAL LOCAL COMMITTEE – 30 AUGUST 2005

**KILMARNOCK TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION STRATEGY
PROGRESS UPDATE**

Report by Executive Director of Development and Property Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Committee of the current status of the consultation process on the Kilmarnock Town Centre Regeneration Strategy.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 At its meeting on 3 May 2005, the Development Services Committee approved a report and accompanying draft strategy for the regeneration of Kilmarnock Town Centre.

- 2.1 A key aspect of the Committee's approval was an extensive consultation process with key stakeholders to ascertain their views, including :

- Promoting Kilmarnock Town Centre Limited;
- Kilmarnock Retail Trades Association
- Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire;
- Ayrshire Economic Forum;
- Local Community Councils / organisations; and
- Various developers and their agents.

- 2.2 It was envisaged originally that this further report would be submitted to the Development Services Committee in August / September 2005.

3 THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 3.1 The meetings involving local business interests in Kilmarnock were held prior to the summer recess of the Council, as follows :

Kilmarnock Town Centre Partnership / Promoting Kilmarnock Town Centre Ltd

This meeting was held in the Council HQ offices on the evening of Monday 20 June 2005. Despite the fact that invitation was by personal letter, the meeting was poorly attended by only 3 representatives of the retail business sector. Councillor Reid and Councillor Campbell both attended in their role as members of the Kilmarnock Town Centre Partnership. This meeting was chaired by Councillor Eric Ross, Chair of the Development Services Committee.

Kilmarnock Town Centre Businesses

A meeting was held in the Park Hotel in the evening of Tuesday 28 June 2005. Invitations, issued through a distribution company, were sent to 336 businesses operating within the broader town entire area, including retailers, accountants, solicitors etc. Invitations were also extended to all Members of the Council.

The meeting was attended by 53 business people representing a reasonable cross section of the businesses within the town centre area. It was also attended by Councillors McIntyre, Smith, Campbell and Reid. It was chaired by Councillor McIntyre, Leader of the Council.

3.2 The format of both meetings was ;

- An introductory presentation by the Chief Executive, setting the scene in terms of the East Ayrshire Community Plan and the context and importance within it of the regeneration of Kilmarnock Town Centre;
- A presentation jointly by the Head of Planning, Development and Building Standards and the Head of Economic Development and Property on the issues and challenges which lie behind the draft strategy, the development proposals which it contains and a range of projects currently being undertaken in furtherance of the objectives of the draft Strategy; and
- An open discussion session with questions and answers.

3.3 The issues and comments raised in these meetings have been summarised and are grouped into broad topic areas, as shown in Appendix 1 to this paper.

3.4 A presentation of the draft strategy, hosted by the Chief Executive, was given to Des Browne MP and Margaret Jamieson MSP;

3.5 A series of "one-to one meetings with key stakeholders, representing property developers, local entrepreneurs and the regional / Scottish offices of retailers with a trading presence in Kilmarnock is currently being undertaken.

3.6 Following the conclusion of the consultation process outlined at 3.1 to 3.5 above, but prior to a further report being submitted to the Development Services Committee, an internal seminar (the detailed arrangements for which have yet to be made) involving appropriate senior Elected Members and Officers will be held to develop and agree the revisions of the draft strategy which will be put to Committee for consideration and approval.

3.7 Due to the impact of the summer recess over the holiday period, together with the extensive nature of the consultation process, the original intention to submit a revised strategy to Committee in August /September 23005 will not be achievable. However, it is proposed that a report will be submitted to the Development Services Committee at its meeting scheduled to be held on 12 October 2005.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1** The development and implementation of the Kilmarnock Town Centre Regeneration Strategy will contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the East Ayrshire Community Plan, through the Improving Opportunities Theme by the development of business accommodation within the town centre and the Improving the Environment Theme, through the return to beneficial use by development, of land within the town centre area.

5 LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** There are no legal or financial implications.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1** That the Committee note the terms of this report.

JAMES LAVERY

Executive Director of Development and Property Services

Jrs\19082005

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

For further information please contact JOHN SPOONER, Business Development Manager at Council Headquarters on telephone 01563 576143.

Implementation Officer : JOHN SPOONER

KILMARNOCK TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION STRATEGY

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND DISCUSSION POINTS RAISED AT THE KILMARNOCK TOWN CENTRE CONSULTATION MEETINGS ON 20th and 28th JUNE 2005

The comments and issues raised in the discussion part of the meetings were as follows :

- The presentation on the Strategy did not articulate a strong vision – there is a need to develop a “unique vision of Kilmarnock” to make it attractive to residents and to shoppers;
- The vision need to be long-term – watch the danger of “selling off the family silver” – keep the car-parks, they are needed – may even need to build more;
- Housing in the town centre is most important – particular reference was made to the importance of developing the Mill Street site with residential property;
- There is no future for offices in the town centre;
- A counter view was expressed, from experience in Covent Garden in London, that offices are of vital importance to the regeneration of the town centre, for the revenue and life which they bring – housing in the town centre is also important, particularly to attract people with disposable income;
- There are significant issues about the cleanliness of the town centre area, in terms of the timing and frequency of cleansing and cleaning operations – this applies both to areas of hard and soft landscaping;
- The appearance of the town centre could be enhanced by an extension to the area in which floral hanging baskets are provided in the summer;
- Leisure and culture in the town centre were not mentioned in the presentation but is seen as a vital ingredient for a vibrant town centre, particularly in terms of generating the “evening economy”;
- The contribution of “exhibitions” to generating visitors was commented upon, with particular reference to the previous success of the Dinosaurs Exhibition”;
- Safety, particularly for pedestrians, is an important issue and perceived lack of safety is a disincentive to people to use the town centre outwith regular trading hours;

- Concern expressed about the intimidating effect of groups of young people “hanging about” in the Burns Mall – allied to this was concern about the level of police presence available in the town centre, particularly in that when the dedicated town centre police officer is not on duty, there is no replacement;
- Concern expressed about lack of public toilet provision and availability during extended opening hours of shops;
- Concern expressed about the Foregate walkway – safety and cleanliness issues – predominance of charity shops – issues about collection of charges in the multi-storey car-park being by machine and not by a person;
- The recently instituted scheme of parking charges was acknowledged as “working” but the “one-way” traffic management system, including the traffic lights, is not;
- Requests made for parking charge concessions to be available for people working in shops, particularly where they are involved in using their cars for the purposes of their work;
- Concern expressed about the impact that any new office developments might have on the existing “skyscape” – particularly the top-of-the-town office in relation to the viaduct;
- Related to the above point, the view was expressed that the proposed office development is only a “retail shed with glass”;
- Question asked if there is actually market demand for all of the office space which is proposed ?”;
- Question about the site of the former cattle market in West Langlands Street – confirmed that it will be brought into the town centre area;
- Discussion about the number of empty shops in the town centre (suggestion made that charity shops could be equated to empty shops) – is the answer to reduce the business rates to what are perceived as “affordable levels” ? – independent retailers can’t afford to pay the rates levied;
- Concern expressed about the highly visible advertisement hoardings on the arterial routes into Kilmarnock, which are carrying advertisements for East Kilbride – response given that the actual adverts on billboards is outwith the control of planning powers;
- For Kilmarnock to be attractive and develop, it must offer something which is different from East Kilbride and other competitor locations – this could be tied in some way to the history and industrial heritage of the town and the area;

- Kilmarnock needs a traditional “department store” – question raised about the effectiveness of the use of their upper level floorspace by Marks and Spencer;
- Discussion about the “hopper bus” linking the town centre, with Queens Drive, Low Glencairn and West Langlands Street – original proposals have not come fully to fruition;
- Question about the proposed “Town Centre Trust” and what the funds which it generates will be used for – have firm proposals been developed ? – can it be used to help fund a Town Centre Manager and to support costs of helping businesses to market themselves ?;
- Discussion about the VICO development at Portland Gate – reference to a previous Portland Gate Action Group - empty shops / inappropriate size of units – can the Council pressurise the owners to reduce the asking rentals ? – can the Council use powers of compulsory purchase to acquire the empty units and reconfigure them into more suitable size of units?;
- Lesson of Portland Gate is “not to take the cheap option or develop in a piecemeal basis – think quality” – the strategy needs to take a long term view;
- Comments offered about the economics of construction costs for new properties (exceed resultant capital values) / the economics of doing business in Kilmarnock (lower profits);
- Raising the image of the area and public perceptions of it is a long term task – one priority is the image presented by school pupils in the town centre area.