

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 25 JUNE 2003

CUMNOCK TOWN CENTRE

Report by the Director of Development Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To update Committee on the progress of the work being carried out in relation to the redevelopment proposals for Cumnock Town Centre and seek approval to develop a range of options.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Committee agreed on 27 August 2002 that a review should be carried out by Development Services staff of development options for Cumnock Town Centre, with particular reference to an assessment of the following:

- Development options at Glaisnock Shopping Centre
- Audit of existing retail/office provision
- Traffic/car parking/bus access options
- Options for office provision, following the success of attracting the Child Support Agency to the town

There have been previous redevelopment proposals for the town centre, the most recent of which was Miglia Property Development who had outline proposals for a redevelopment around the Greenbraes/Greenholm Road area. In order to secure land for development, Miglia had taken property options on various sites in the area. Following the expiry of these options earlier this year, the Council commenced work in assessing alternative development proposals.

- 2.2** The Council has been working closely with the newly formed Cumnock Town Centre Initiative, which has a strong representation from the retailers in the Glaisnock Shopping Centre, as well as from other businesses in and around the town centre.
- 2.3** Separately, SEA have been working with the Council to identify site options for a speculative office building aimed at attracting more service jobs to Cumnock.
- 2.4** Independently from the Scottish Enterprise Proposal there is a potential for town centre office accommodation for some Council and other public service organisations.
- 2.5** Proposals have also emerged for residential development on a site on Greenholm Road which is within the area originally identified for an integrated development approach.

3. AUDIT OF EXISTING ACTIVITY

- 3.1** The Council appointed retail specialists, Messrs Graham & Sibbald, Chartered Surveyors, to carry out an audit of current town centre activity in relation to the retail premises available, prospects for expansion, as well as an assessment of existing office provision and new development proposals.
- 3.2** One of the key objectives of any development proposal, whether it be retail/commercial is to protect the vitality and balance of the existing business in the town centre. The Members of Cumnock Town Centre Initiative have supported the Council in this respect.
- 3.3** Graham & Sibbald reported that on the wider local economy, Cumnock had benefited from the work carried out by the Council/Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire in diversifying the local business base from traditional manufacturing by attracting over 1000 new jobs in projects such as:

Service Sector Projects

Child Support Agency
Original Shoe Co

Manufacturing Company Projects

Caledonian Bottlers
National Autistic Society

- 3.4** The audit carried out by Graham & Sibbald highlighted the following statistics::
- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| ▪ No of Businesses | 97 Shops
41 Offices |
| ▪ Local Traders | 69 |
| ▪ Multiple Traders | 29 |

There is a good selection of service providers e.g.

- Travel companies
- Banks
- Professional services
- Mortgage advisers
- Dentists

Supermarket provision was evenly balanced (see below) in relation to national trends:

- Safeway – principally ‘basket shopping’
- Tesco (Auchinleck) – good access and choice
- Somerfield – good access, limited choice

Graham & Sibbald advised that in their view there was limited scope for additional supermarket provision.

3.5 On the issue of Glaisnock Shopping Centre:

- Built in mid 1970's
- High level of occupancy
- Little change in tenancy over 10 years
- Parking and access problems

A key issue is the continued presence of Safeway, as its lease with the Council can be broken in two year's time and at present the company is in the middle of a takeover battle.

3.6 On the issue of the local office market:

- Good mix of local offices, e.g. accountants, lawyers, travel companies, mortgage providers, etc
- Local market demand is in balance

3.7 On the issue of transport:

- Car park at Glaisnock Shopping Centre was repeatedly congested, resulting in leakage to outwith the area.

3.8 In addition to the audit carried out by Graham & Sibbald, a subsequent survey was carried out with local businesses to seek their views on the town centre, the key results of which were as follows:

- 80% were satisfied with the size of their existing premises
- only 2 businesses were considering expanding into larger premises
- car parking was repeatedly raised as an issue
- there were concerns over personal security in the town centre

4. OPTIONS FOR GLAISNOCK SHOPPING CENTRE

4.1 The option of expanding Glaisnock Shopping Centre was explored in general terms, and the key issues were identified as follows:

- The continued occupancy of the anchor tenant is at present uncertain, i.e. until Safeway renew their lease in two years time, investing in the Centre or attracting a development partners could prove difficult
- There are historic 'options to buy' with some of the tenants which could make the development of the complete Centre difficult, particularly if it involves a joint venture option
- There are historic title difficulties over a small part of the Centre with Dumfries Estate, which could be resolved, but which presently present a hurdle to overcome

- The Centre does have an excellent income stream, based on its continual high level of occupancy and is well utilized in the local economy
- The fabric of the building is showing its age
- Car parking/access, as noted in 3 above, is a serious constraining factor
- A large number of parking spaces are taken up, for the full working day, by people who work in the Shopping Centre, which aggravates the existing problem.

4.2 The Council has already, over the last six months, carried out improvements at the Centre which are as follows:

- Resurfacing of the car park
- Repairs to the slabbed area around the Centre
- General redecoration work, include replacement of railings, etc
- Upgrade of the CCTV facilities
- Support given to local business to expand

4.3 Taking account of the above, it is recommended that the Council does not take an investment decision on the Glaisnock Shopping Centre at present, until the future of the Safeway store is known.

4.4 In conjunction with the Roads Division of Development Services, an assessment should be carried out of the options for improving the car parking provision in the area, with the possibility of a bridge access to Council owned land at Greenbraes.

4.5 The Council recently secured a grant of £794,000 from the Scottish Executive for enhancement of bus facilities and access improvements

5 OFFICE LOCATION OPTIONS

5.1 Issues with regard to office redevelopment proposals have also been professionally assessed:

- Independent architects, W I Munro, were commissioned to look at appropriate sites within the town centre or its environs for a speculative office development up to 20,000 sq. ft, with the aim of attracting 200+ new jobs
- Particular priority was asked to be given to the town centre area
- W I Munro reported that as far as the heart of the town centre was concerned, there were no appropriate sites for this size of development. As experience with the CSA at Caponacre

showed, car parking is a key feature of any office development

- Sites at Greenholm Road including the site subject to a residential development proposals were examined, but the view of Munro's was that this was not suitable as:
 - There was limited road access from the main Glaisnock Street. This could only be improved by widening the access, but given that there are two active businesses on either side of the road, this would be very expensive.
 - There would be car parking capacity problems for an office development.
 - The site was not prominent enough and would be on a split level, making the design difficult.

5.2 The view of Munro's was that Caponacre would be a more appropriate site for a larger office development, given access and car parking issues.

5.3 It may, however, be realistic to develop a more appropriate office provision in the town centre, adjacent to the Glaisnock Shopping Centre or at Greenbraes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The initial audit and scoping work on Cumnock Town Centre redevelopment issues has raised a number of interesting points, i.e.:

- Cumnock is a well balanced town centre with regard to retailing and office provision with very little evidence of empty shops, which often blight many high streets.
- There is no evidence to support any major new retail activity, as this would have a seriously detrimental effect on existing businesses.
- Car parking is a key problem in the Shopping Centre, which is resulting in leakage to other areas.
- Serious decisions on development proposals for the Glaisnock Centre cannot be taken probably for another twelve months until the future of the tenancy of Safeway is known.
- At the moment redevelopment plans of any material size cannot be accommodated in the heart of the town in view of site configuration and car parking problems.

6.2 It is suggested that the way forward for the Cumnock development plan would be as follows:

- Assess ways of improving car parking issues and access. These issues are currently being looked into by Development Services Roads Division, together with the potential for expansion into Council owned land at Greenbraes
- Continue further environmental improvements on the Glaisnock Shopping Centre (funding has been approved for (2003/04)
- Assess the physical redevelopment potential of Glaisnock Shopping Centre including the enlargement of the Safeway store and the potential for including limited new office accommodation to provide a town centre base for some public services
- Assess the commercial/funding options for the redevelopment of the Glaisnock Shopping Centre including the feasibility of working with an external joint partner
- Assess office development options at Caponacre Industrial Estate and other Council owned sites in the Town Centre
- Develop proposals based on the Public Transport Fund scheme to improve the pedestrian environment linking the Square to the shopping centre, and to improve accessibility to the shopping centre by public Transport Services Unit
- investigate the possibility of securing funds to assist in decontamination and redevelopment of the former gasworks site

7 LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no legal or financial implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

8. RECOMMENDATION

8.1 That Committee notes the interim report on the work that has been carried out, and agrees the action plan, as noted above.

Stephen Chorley
Director of Development Services

SC/JR
 12 June 2003

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

For further information on the contents of this report contact Robert Paton. Tel. 01563 576142.

Implementation Officer: Robert Paton