

PORTFOLIO:

ECONOMY & ENTERPRISE

Report of
Portfolio Holder:

**COUNCILLOR
COLIN GLOVER**

Local Plan

Following publication of the National Planning Policy Framework the Council is taking forward its work on the Core Strategy into a new Local Plan. Work has been continuing following last year's successful consultations and we will use this as the basis for the new plan. Pursuing this route will enable the Council to get all its land allocations and policies in place sooner than anticipated and will help set a strong basis for growth.

City Centre Vitality

The overall position for retail activity in Carlisle City Centre remains positive despite Hoopers having announced it is closing its Carlisle store. Overall retail vacancies remain relatively low compared to other centres and the introduction of new retailers to the city such as Internacionale and Jack and Jones and the imminent investment by Debenhams in their store underline ongoing confidence as a retail centre.

Aviva have recently placed The Lanes Shopping Centre on the market as an investment and the quality of interested potential purchasers is very encouraging.

Plans for the creation of a formal Business Improvement District are now in their final stages with the proposed Business Plan having been agreed at a recent meeting of the Carlisle City Centre Management Company (the formal proposer of the BID). The Directors of this Company now represent a good cross section of city centre retail and leisure businesses including both national and local businesses, and includes representation from the City Council.

Benefits to businesses of a BID are set out in the draft Business Plan and include marketing & promotion of the city centre to improve footfall, better communication and intelligence, strong business leadership and advocacy, a collective voice to influence decisions about the city centre and maintain service levels, and collective bargaining power to drive down business costs.

Cost to businesses is based entirely on the Rateable Value (RV) of their premises and a 1% levy of the RV is proposed (with a de minimis level of £7,500). Total expected revenue for the BID is c £200,000 per annum derived from around 320 businesses, and it is proposed that the BID will have an initial life of 5 years. The proposed area of the BID covers the main retail area of the city centre from Lowther Street across to the Viaduct, from West Tower Street / Drovers Lane to Blackfriars Street and Castle Street.

The agreed Business Plan will now form the basis of the required Ballot of all constituent business with the Ballot Period being from 26th July – 23rd August. If the Ballot delivers a “Yes” then the BID will start operation from September onwards.

A Portas Pilot submission was put forward to support secondary retail areas immediately adjacent to the City Centre, such as Earls Lane, Lonsdale Street and Warwick Road, together with support for specialist / local shops in similar peripheral areas. Other ideas put forward were to involve the College in their local agency role for the National Retail Academy to support would be retail entrepreneurs by occupying vacant retail premises. There were over 370 bids put forward and unfortunately the Carlisle submission was not one of the 12 chosen to benefit from the scheme, but in drawing up the submission there was useful dialogue with both landlords of vacant property and engagement of both the Chamber and Carlisle College which can be built upon.

Events in the City Centre

Events in general contribute to the economic vibrancy of the city centre. Recent weeks have seen excellent events such as the Jubilee celebrations, Carlisle Music City and the Olympic Torch Relay. It is important to use the city centre as a social space as well as a shopping centre. We look forward to developing this further in the future to make the centre of the city a vibrant mixed-use space that will bring in activity and support retail and other businesses.

National Grid North West Coast Connections Project

The National Grid is embarking on one of its largest infrastructure projects in Cumbria, which will be required to connect the new nuclear power station planned for Moorside. An initial consultation is being undertaken and closes on the 19th July. The National Grid has put forward six options for new transmission lines and undertaken initial assessment work. Detailed work in relation to some of these options is still to follow, however on first consideration there are a variety of impacts, some of which may be positive.

The Executive have responded to the consultation and in particular the National Grid's preferred options which provide a "Cumbria Ring" of new transmission lines. Whilst this may bring benefits for Carlisle and North Cumbria with the opportunity for new connectivity for large electricity suppliers or users, there will also be significant environmental and landscape impacts which require further assessment. We will be closely involved in the future stages of this consultation and whilst we support the initial assessment we reserve our position until more detail is available. It is recognised that increasing transmission lines and electricity infrastructure will help to make Cumbria a more accessible place and improve connectivity across the County.

Discover Carlisle

Conceived and launched in 2010, the Discover Carlisle website has grown from its tourism routes and diversified with the recent addition of the 'Business Inward Investment' section. Quite often people's first impression of Carlisle, the Discover Carlisle website gains over 400 unique visits per day. The plan to develop Discover Carlisle as a recognised Carlisle City Council brand has taken a further step forward with the appointment of a 'Brand Development Officer' on the 2 July 2012.

There will be a 3 month review of Discover Carlisle activity and potential whilst developments are ongoing, followed by a 3month implementation of the strategy and action plan taking us into 2013 with a 'one stop shop' information point for tourists, businesses and local residents.

A further part of the work is to have greater engagement with businesses via a multipurpose database enabling much clearer and effective dissemination of information, together with reinvigorated working with partners such as Cumbria Tourism, English Heritage and Carlisle Economic Partnership which will all result in a new momentum for promoting Carlisle.

Building Control

Building Control passed its annual re-assessment by BSi on its quality assurance ISO 9001 system on the 2nd July 2012 thus retaining the award that it has held continuously since 1995. Being registered helps Carlisle City Council's Building Control department compete with other Building Control bodies to win work with customers who require a quality assured Building Control Service.

New Sainsbury Store - Staff Recruitment

The planning permission for the Sainsbury development had a requirement that an employment and training scheme to be put in place. The City Council have therefore been instrumental in initiating a partnership between Carlisle College and Sainsbury to develop an inclusive approach to the recruitment for the new store. College staff received training on the Sainsbury recruitment process and requirements of the business.

This has enabled the delivery of a range of pre-employment courses with unemployed individuals. Working closely with the Job Centre training has been provided to 60 short-term unemployed individuals who on completion of the courses have received guaranteed interviews. The College have also worked with the Work Programme contractors to offer training and support to longer term unemployed.

Sainsbury have been using Carlisle College to undertake all interviews and induction and training for all new recruits will take place at the college over the next 3 months.

On the 29th and 30th June, a recruitment event was held at the college. Over 3,760 individuals attended the event with over 1,000 applying for the vacancies on line at the college over the 2 days.

Councillor Colin Glover
Economy & Enterprise Portfolio Holder