



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
Castle Ward

**FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:
OSMB**

13th May 2010

**Divisional Response to the Regeneration and Transportation
Scrutiny Task Group Review on the impact of Highcross Leicester**

**Report of the Directors of Planning and Economic Development; Regeneration,
Highways and Transport; City Centre; and Environmental Services**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide OSMB with a combined divisional level officer response to the Regeneration and Transportation Scrutiny Task Group review of the impact of Highcross Leicester.

2. SUMMARY

The Task Group report on the impact of Highcross Leicester is welcomed and a number of key areas of focus and potential improvements are noted. Each of the Task Group recommendations are responded to below in terms of current and proposed activity together with the potential for additional scrutiny focus particularly on gateways to the city.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

OSMB are requested to note the comments in this report and consider implications for the Task Group report on the impact of Highcross Leicester.

4. REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Board has received a report from the Regeneration and Transportation Scrutiny Task Group on a review of the impact of Highcross Leicester. The report is an important piece of work highlighting the high value of Highcross and related activity such as the public realm improvements. The report identifies some of the key issues and challenges that remain in the City Centre. Divisional comments have been requested on this report which are set out below. These comments focus on the recommendations set out in Section 21 and 2.2 of the report to OSMB of 11th February 2010.

Strategic considerations

Divisional Comment:

Budget announcements made since the Task Group met will have a significant impact on the ability of the Council and its partners to carry out capital and revenue funded improvements highlighted by the Group. Inevitably projects will have to be implemented over time in a phased approach as and when funds become available.

4.1 Task Group Recommendation:

Major routes into the city need to be improved to attract more customers to the city centre as a whole, to reduce the semi-derelict aspect of parts of these approaches and to enhance the sense of a city under regeneration.

Divisional comment:

The appearance of major routes into the City are essential to improving the image of Leicester and to attracting inward investors and visitors to the City. Considerable investment has been made in recent years to gateway sites including Humberstone Road roundabout, Upperton Road Viaduct, car parking signage linked to Highcross, bus corridor projects and public realm improvements more generally.

Sites and buildings that are vacant, untidy and boarded up are a particular problem, more so since the onset of the recession which has seen a fall in development activity. Some activity is currently underway to encourage development and use of existing property (e.g. car showroom on A50 has been brought back into use) and investment in new infrastructure (e.g. highway regeneration scheme at Sanvey Gate on A50). Removal of the subway and public realm improvement work is being undertaken at Granby Street/St Georges Way which will greatly improve the look of this key gateway into the city centre linking to the station.

Work is underway to identify priority improvement actions as part of the City Centre Management Board approach which will help improve the appearance of major gateways to the City. Funding sources will need to be identified to carry this forward.

4.2 Task Group Recommendation:

Car parking standards should be raised and signage to them should be improved

Divisional comment:

Car parking will be subject to a supplementary planning document that will be prepared over the next 6 months to tie into the Planning Core Strategy and Local Transport Plan 3. This will consider issues relating to unauthorised use of vacant sites for parking, location and quality of authorised car parks, signage, charging, sustainability issues and business needs.

A workshop has been held with Highways and Transportation to discuss improving the clarity of signage into the City and related car parking signage. A task group has been formed to progress the ideas and actions with a view to possible implementation of measures from 2011 subject to approvals and funding.

- 4.3 Task Group Recommendation:
The areas between high-quality developments such as Highcross, Curve and the Phoenix Square should be improved to encourage users of Highcross Leicester to go to other parts of the City Centre.

Divisional comment:

A considerable investment has already been made in public realm to improve connectivity between city centre facilities. This will help in encouraging shoppers and visitors to move between areas within the city centre. Key new developments will also encourage greater movement in the city centre e.g. Curve, Phoenix Square and Enderby Park and Ride terminus.

Some investment is also being made in improving vacant shop units through the work of the City Centre Director to avoid 'dead' shop frontages. The city has however had a lower shop vacancy rate during the recession compared with many other comparable cities such as Derby and Nottingham. Further public realm works have recently been completed e.g. Cank Street, and others are due to start e.g. Granby Street linked to the New Business Quarter. The proposed improvement of the City Centre Market would assist in creating more movement between key centres of activity in the city centre retail circuit.

There is further discussion led by the City Centre Director on looking at improving the signage and lighting between different areas to form improved connections. Future marketing and PR initiatives will communicate the ease of connectivity between areas and short walking distances. Improvement on directional signage and parking signage will also help change perceptions about the distance between each area.

- 4.4 Task Group Recommendation
The policies developed by and with Job Centre Plus within Leicester should be used as a model for partnership and community cohesion work in other parts of the East Midlands, and indeed the UK.

Divisional comment:

The City Council has worked with JC+ to roll out this model as part of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund initiative. The new Multi Access Centres and the services delivered through them, together with linked employer engagement initiatives are a key element of this work. Opportunities to raise the profile of this work beyond the city would contribute significantly to the Talking up Leicester priority of the Council.

Management issues

- 4.5 Task Group Recommendation
Agencies, landlords and agents should work closely together to reduce voids within the City Centre. This should include using short-term promotions for the Centre or of creative use of space to provide art and other attractive options and outlets for talent within the city.

Divisional comment:

The City Centre Director is working closely with these groups to understand their needs and support them to help reduce voids. Work has also been undertaken to install images on vacant shopfronts to create visual interest and minimise 'dead frontages'. It is worth noting the difficulty that has been experienced in securing appropriate shopfronts for this project owing to vacant shops being brought back into use earlier than expected. The LCB Depot team have been supporting the reuse of private property for instance in Humberstone Gate and Rutland Street as a measure to bring vacant property back into use. This has helped address vacancy during the recession.

City Centre Management has received funding £52k from DCLG and an additional amount of £15k from the Arts Council to implement an 'Art Walk' initiative which will not only help to improve the look of empty units but encourage the public to walk around the city and explore areas they may not necessarily normal visit.

Empty shop windows have been used successfully to promote events and attractions such as the Christmas theatre productions, Comedy Festival, Spark Festival, Curve and Phoenix Square and the Art Exhibition at New Walk Museum,

City Centre Management informs landlords/agents if any shop windows have been cracked or broken so repairs can be carried out quickly. Leicestershire Constabulary has commented that the number of broken windows in the city centre has reduced since the vinyl graphic project.

4.6 Task Group Recommendation

Greater control should be exercised in planning and licensing terms to improve the quality of shop frontages and reduce the impact of short-term lets and the visual and oral impact of day-traders.

Divisional comment:

Many shopfront changes will not require planning permission and consequently the Council cannot exercise any formal control. Shop tenants subject to short term lets are unlikely to significantly alter shopfronts. Poor quality interim signage is often a problem but cannot be regulated by the Council. There is scope for the City Centre Director to influence landlords through City Centre Forums. Where planning controls can be exercised, particularly in conservation areas, planning staff will aim to negotiate a quality outcome for the streetscene.

4.7 Task Group Recommendation

Bus operators should run services reflecting the more flexible operating hours of city centre stores – for the benefit of shoppers and staff.

Divisional comment:

The Council will engage in discussions with the bus companies and the retail sector to identify any gaps in service provision and - where there is evidence of latent demand - consider how service enhancements can be funded until their commercial potential is able to be assessed.

4.8 Task Group Recommendation

A public-private partnership should develop a strong marketing campaign for the city centre based on strong iconic images which can be used at regional, national and international level to attract business and leisure customers to the city.

Divisional comment:

The City Centre Director has included this issue in the emerging action plan developed with centre stakeholders and she sits on the Talking Up Leicester Priority Board. A marketing forum has been set up under City Centre Management comprising of key stakeholders with the objective of bringing better coordination of marketing activity and consistency of message. The success of this group will depend mostly on the availability of marketing funding to implement the city centre marketing strategy and plan.

4.9 Task Group Recommendation

Strong management of the street scene should be deployed to reduce litter and help create a stronger sense of public “ownership” of public space and pride in the facilities on offer.

Divisional comment:

The new City Centre management arrangements will assist in improving the management of the street scene through bringing together a virtual team of council services and other partners to coordinate activity and events. This will contribute to developing more pride and ownership in public spaces.

Following a successful pilot, the City Warden service has been enhanced, with the number of Wardens in the City being increased to 22% (one per Ward) enabling the service to be rolled-out city-wide from May 2010. As well as increasing the Warden resources available for city centre work (including evenings and weekends) it will increase overall awareness and impact of the service and help deliver a zero-tolerance approach to litter, graffiti, flyposting, etc.

The Service will work closely with the “Cleaner City” street cleaning teams to improve the cleanliness of the city centre and tackle problems such as night-time flyering, trade waste/bins being left on the streets in the daytime etc.

Close liaison with the City Centre Manager will also help to ensure greater collaboration and support with the City Centre retail community.

5. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Financial Implications

No significant issues

5.2 Legal Implications

No significant issues

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph references within the report
Equal Opportunities	No	
Policy	Yes	The Local Development Framework and Local Transport Plan will contribute to positive action identified in the report.
Sustainable and Environmental	Yes	Report refers to public realm improvement and bus operations.
Crime and Disorder	Yes	Well managed city centre will assist in reducing crime.
Human Rights Act	No	
Elderly/People on Low Income	Yes	Good access to city centre facilities is key to elderly people and those on low income.
Corporate Parenting	No	
Health Inequalities Impact	No	

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Report to OSMB of Regeneration and Transportation Scrutiny Task Group Review on the impact of Highcross Leicester – 11th February 2010

8. CONSULTATIONS

Relevant Directors and Heads of Service

9. REPORT AUTHOR

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