

Agenda - Scrutiny Working Group (Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates)



Time: 4:00pm

Date: Tuesday 15 October, 2019

Venue: Esperance Room

1. Appointment of Chairman

2. Apologies

3. Declarations of Interest from Members

To declare any personal, pecuniary or disclosable pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct and any possible contraventions under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

4. Review of Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates

The Group will receive a presentation from the Economic Development Manager - Enclosed

Councillors:

Boucker, A.S.

Fitzgerald, Ms. A.A.

Hewitt, P.M.

Startin, P.D.

Todd, Mrs. D.M.

Wilkinson, Ms. C.L.

Witton, P.T.

Officers:

D. Piper Head of Economic Prosperity

D. Harris Economic Development Manager

W. Rowe Senior Committee Officer

Date Despatched: 8 October, 2019

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

NOTES OF THE

**SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP -
CANNOCK TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION
AND OCCUPANCY RATE REVIEW**

TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER, 2019 AT 4.00 P.M.

HELD IN THE ESPERANCE ROOM, CIVIC CENTRE,

BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

Present:

Councillor P.M. Hewitt (Chairman)
Councillor Ms. A.A. Fitzgerald
Councillor P.D. Startin
Councillor Mrs. D.M. Todd
Councillor Ms. C.L. Wilkinson
Councillor P.T. Witton

Officers: D. Piper, Head of Economic Prosperity
D. Harris, Economic Development Manager
W. Rowe, Senior Committee Officer

1. Appointment of Chairman

It was agreed that Councillor P. Hewitt would be Chairman of the Working Group.

2. Declarations of Interests from Members

Nothing declared.

3. Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates Review

Debbie Harris, Economic Development Manager provided Members with a presentation on Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates. She explained that Members may wish to consider whether ASB, drug activity and the street market was having an effect on the occupancy rates.

A recent survey by the GBSLEP reported that 62% of retailers were dissatisfied with the town. Retailers believe empty shops, antisocial behaviour, drugs, drinking, shoplifting and lack of shops/variety were the main weaknesses of the town centre.

Members noted the current position in Cannock regarding vacant units which demonstrated a 100% increase since 2016.

The Group noted that high streets were struggling nationally and the key issues included:-

- Rents that are too high
- Business rates
- Drugs & ASB
- Parking charges
- The overall offer
- Rise of on-line shopping

Members noted the changing consumer behaviour which included an increase in internet shopping, challenging economic conditions and changes in the way retailers operate and engage with their customers.

The Group were shown a table comparing rents in Cannock with those in Stafford. This confirmed that Cannock, from the evidence provided, appeared to be costly in comparison to Stafford. However, the ability to influence these rental levels was minimal giving they were privately owned.

Compared to Stafford, Cannock rates are higher on comparable units. Given that Stafford has a higher footfall and a better offer in terms of shops and food/drink – this shows a rateable value that is high. As the amounts payable are determined by Central Government through the Valuation Office the ability to influence is minimal. Lobbying Government nationally could be the way forward.

With regards to drug use and ASB it was noted that begging had increased by 350% (9 incidents in the last 12 months), drug related incidents had increased by 21% (23 incidents in the last 12 months) and there had been no change in drinking related incidents (14 incidents in the last 12 months).

The Group were shown a table outlining car parking charges on the two main car parks within Stafford and Cannock. This showed that the rates in Cannock were much higher than in Stafford the longer the stay. It was also noted that Cannock had no facility to pay other than cash – Lichfield and Stafford have multiple payment options including Contactless and “pay-by-phone”.

The Group noted that:-

- Successful highstreets and town centres are those that are reinventing themselves as a destination offering an experience as well as a place to shop.
- Popular town centres are now those that offer modern car parking infrastructure, restaurants and entertainment.
- The Government is aware of the need to repurpose the towns and highstreets in the UK – for example their announcement of the “Future high street fund” and “Towns Fund” shows their commitment to this.
- Cannock's retail offer to the consumer is weak. There is no anchor shop, other retail outlets are being lost at an increasing rate, limited food/drink, and no “place-to-be” shops, which not only act as an anchor store, but encourage visitors to spend more time in the town centre.

- Council has an agreed plan - the vision for Cannock Town Centre is to become a culture and leisure hub, creating 21st century experiences.
- McArthurGlen Outlet – could have a positive impact on the Town Centre and developing a complementary offer could encourage new investment

The Officer advised that the Development Prospectus was launched on 1 October 2019 and this outlined that the McArthurGlen Outlet would act as a catalyst for growth and consideration would be given to what makes Cannock a great investment opportunity. The vision within the prospectus was to create Cannock as a culture and leisure hub with a new cinema complex, hotel and successful independent restaurants. 9 investment sites within the town centre had been identified.

Further to this outlining research, the Officer suggested that, to get a deeper understanding of the occupancy rates and possible issues surrounding this, the Group may wish to look at the following potential areas:

- External factors such as ASB and drug activity – (Community Scrutiny Committee).
- Town Centre Partnership activities – what are they doing to increase footfall?
- Cannock Development Prospectus – Potential market interest after launch.
- Cannock Shopping Centre – Invitation to examine their perception and experience of footfall within the shopping centre – look at trends.
- Engagement with landlords, agents and intermediaries to ascertain their views on issues faced in Cannock Town Centre and why vacancy rates are high.
- Street market, invite property colleagues to discuss the effects on overall footfall and occupancy rates.

Following the presentation the Group had a lengthy discussion on which areas to focus on and they gave consideration to where they could have some effect. It was agreed that they would concentrate on 4 of the suggested areas. They considered that car parking was a massive issue and that the ability to pay by card, contactless and “pay-by-phone” would make a difference. In addition, incentives such as a free parking day on market days, or parking free after 3pm/4pm were discussed. However, the Group noted that similar incentives (i.e. charging 10p to park after 3pm) had been trialled a while ago with little effect.

The Head of Economic Prosperity advised that Officers would need to have a discussion with colleagues (Steve Schofield, Senior Technical Officer, Joss Presland, Waste and Engineering Services Manager and Mike Edmonds, Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles) regarding car parking to ascertain what options were available, the costs involved in updating the parking meters and to determine the benefits.

A Member held the view that the street market could be affecting the shop owners’ trade as they sold similar goods but had less rent/overheads to pay. The Group noted that there was a market charter in Cannock which meant that it was necessary for a market to be held in the town centre. Another Member advised

that Street Markets had been reviewed last year and it was seen as a positive initiative with another day being added to the offer on a trial basis. Although this trial had received mixed results due to various factors, one being the weather, the market operator was planning to trial the extra day again in the Spring next year. As a review of the Street Market had already been undertaken the Group agreed they would not consider it as part of this review.

Members decided not to look at business rates as they could not influence the business rates that were charged. Additionally, they considered it was a little too early to get involved in the Cannock Development Prospectus and they were satisfied that a team of officers were currently working on this.

Members then discussed ASB and drug activity within the town centre and whether this was affecting trade. The Group noted that another Scrutiny Committee was reviewing ASB and drug activity within the town and the affect this was having on crime. If the Group wished to look at this issue consideration should be given to any duplication but there may be an option to share findings. The Economic Development Manager advised that she would scope this out, liaise with Kerry Wright, Partnerships and Communications Manager, who was leading on the other Scrutiny Committee review, with a view to inputting any findings into their review. The Economic Development Manager agreed to share any information she obtained via email to the Group before the next meeting.

Another issue Members considered to be important was the high rents. It was suggested that a discussion with landlords and estate agents would be beneficial to understand why the rents were so high. The Group asked what percentage of the units within the town centre were owned by the Council. The Economic Development Manager confirmed that the Council owned approximately 10 units and 4 of these were vacant. Members considered that it may be useful to compare the Council owned rents to those that were privately owned. The Group agreed that they should engage with landlords and the estate agents who marketed the units within the town centre (including CCDC owned units). It should be made clear that the Group had no power to alter rents and any information they shared would be voluntary to try to understand why the rents were so high. The Head of Economic Prosperity added that it may be difficult to engage with landlords regarding rental prices; however it would be easier to get the agents involved.

Members also considered that it would be beneficial to liaise with the Town Centre Partnership to ascertain what events they had planned to promote the town centre and increase footfall and to seek their input into the number of vacant units.

It was suggested that Fred Pritchard and Mike Mellor, who rented out a number of town centre units, along with Rhiannon Holland (Principal Property Services Officer) should be contacted to seek further information regarding rental prices. Members noted that, as Fred Pritchard was also the Chairman of the Town Centre Partnership, a discussion could be held with him regarding the work of the Partnership along with the rental challenges.

The Chairman then summarised the discussions. The Working Group supported

the following:-

(A) That two further Working Group meetings be held on dates to be agreed in consultation with the Chairman. The next meeting would focus on the following two issues:-

- (i) Car parking - relevant officers be invited to attend the meeting to discuss the issues identified above.
- (ii) ASB and drug activity within the town centre - liaison with the relevant officer undertaking the other Scrutiny Committee review to understand the scope of that review and the potential to provide input in terms of the effect on town centre trade.

(B) That the second meeting would focus on the following two issues:-

- (i) High rents – liaise/invite estate agents and possibly landlords to ascertain and understand why the rents were so high
- (ii) Town Centre Partnership – liaise/invite representatives identified above to advise on the work the Partnership was doing to promote the town centre in addition to discussing the rental challenges.

The meeting finished at 5.05 pm.

Please ask for: Mrs. W. Rowe
Extension No: 4584
E-mail: wendyrowe@cannockchasedc.gov.uk



Agenda - Scrutiny Working Group (Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates)

Time: 4:00pm
Date: Thursday 9 January, 2020
Venue: Esperance Room

1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interest from Members

To declare any personal, pecuniary or disclosable pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct and any possible contraventions under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

3. Notes of previous meeting

To agree the notes of the previous meeting held on 15 October, 2019 (enclosed).

4. Review of Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates

Car Parking Issues

Mike Edmonds, Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles and Joss Presland, Waste and Engineering Services Manager, will be in attendance to discuss the car parking issues raised at the previous meeting.

Councillors:

Boucker, A.S.
Fitzgerald, Ms. A.A.
Hewitt, P.M. (Chairman)
Startin, P.D.
Todd, Mrs. D.M.
Wilkinson, Ms. C.L.
Witton, P.T.



Officers:

D. Piper	Head of Economic Prosperity
D. Harris	Economic Development Manager
W. Rowe	Senior Committee Officer

Date Despatched: 2 January, 2020

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

NOTES OF THE

**SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP -
CANNOCK TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION
AND OCCUPANCY RATES REVIEW**

THURSDAY 9 JANUARY 2020 AT 4.00 P.M.

HELD IN THE ESPERANCE ROOM, CIVIC CENTRE, CANNOCK

Present:

Councillors:

P.M. Hewitt (Chairman)
A.S. Boucker Ms. C.L. Wilkinson
Mrs. A.A. Fitzgerald P.T. Witton
P.D. Startin

Officers:

D. Piper (Head of Economic Prosperity)
M. Edmonds (Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles)
Mrs. D. Harris (Economic Development Manager)
J. Presland (Waste and Engineering Services Manager)
M. Berry (Democratic Services Team Leader)

4. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted for Councillor Mrs. D.M. Todd.

5. Declarations of Interests from Members

Nothing declared.

6. Notes of Previous Meeting

The Notes of the previous meeting held on 15 October 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

7. Review of Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates – Car Parking Issues

The Head of Environment & Healthy Lifestyles and the Waste & Engineering Services Manager gave a presentation in respect of car parking issues in Cannock town centre that covered:

Payment Options for Car Parking

- Looking at provision of new Pay & Display (P&D) ticket machines that would accept

- payment by contactless and debit / credit card, as well as existing coin payments;
- Report to be submitted to Cabinet before the end of the 2019/20 financial year;
- If approved, procurement and implementation of new machines would take place during 2020/21;
- Currently 20 P&D machines were in place across the District, of which 7 were located in Cannock town centre;
- Estimated capital costs to replace each machine were in the region of £4,500;
- There would be additional revenue costs in respect of transaction fees for non-cash payments;
- It was estimated that initial take up of the new payment methods would be 8-10% of all transactions;
- Payment by Phone (PbP) – the Council was currently a named partner in a county-wide procurement exercise arrangement led by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, procurement for which would be undertaken during 2020/21;
- PbP was already being successfully operated in Stafford borough and Lichfield district.

Car Parking Charges and Rationale

- Total P&D Income and Expenditure 2018/19:
 - Income from P&D was £712,000, budgeted income was £741,000;
 - Income from Penalty Charges was £52,000;
 - Cost of operation (enforcement / cash collection / tribunals etc.) was £113,000;
 - Cost of running (all) (rates / electricity / repair and maintenance) – actual cost was £395,000 compared to budget provision of £383,000;
 - Income from P&D car parks in Cannock was £546,000.
- Total Income District / Cannock town centre:
 - 86% of sales were on the '2 hour' tariff;
 - Long stay (all day) tariffs available at some car parks – priced at £4 and £5;
 - Long stay tariffs were priced high on some car parks.
- Usage Hours (Beecroft Road):
 - 91% (180,387) '2 hour' tickets;
 - 7% (14,077) '3 hour' tickets;
 - 2% (4,112) '4 hour' tickets;
 - 60-70% before 1pm (December 2019 figure).
- Rationale Behind Charges:
 - Previously tried to operate '10p after 3pm', but didn't result in an increase in car park usage – this approach was used to help measure the usage of the car parks after 3pm;
 - Reduce workers using shoppers car parks (Beecroft Road and Backcrofts);
 - Encourage use of long-stay car parks;
 - Drop in parking challenges since the '2 hour' tariff was introduced;
 - Don't charge for parking on Sundays, Bank Holidays or in the evenings (town centres were not overly busy on Sundays).
- Comparison with Others:
 - Medium term (3 to 6 hours) was more expensive than rates charged by

- Stafford BC (Stafford town centre was struggling in its northern / central parts (i.e. those areas not within area of the Riverside development);
- On-par with charges set by Lichfield DC – there was however an argument that Lichfield had a better tourist appeal for visitors.
- Cost of Free Days:
 - 2 free parking days provided over Christmas period were at a cost of £3,000 per day;
 - If free days were to be offered on ‘Market days’, this would be at a cost of £1,900 to £2,400 per day.

In respect of the initial take up of new payment methods, Members noted surprise that the predicted level was not higher than 8-10%. Officers replied that this figure was for the first 6 to 12 months of operation, but it was hoped that as usage increased, the Council may be able to negotiate down the level of transaction fees payable.

The Chairman queried what the financial implications of these proposals would be for the Council. Officers replied that the costs were still being worked upon for inclusion in the Cabinet report. The costs of purchasing the machines should be capital rather than revenue costs, but this was still being explored.

The Chairman then noted the level of income received from Penalty Charges could reduce as a result of the new payment methods.

A Member queried if the closure of the Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP) had affected income levels. The Head of Economic Prosperity replied that the MSCP had not been well used when it was still open, but since its closure, traders had commented that there had been fewer people using the town centre. It was considered though that this wasn't the case as other car parking was still readily available. More generally, the standard of MSCPs had improved in the years since the one in Cannock town centre was built.

The Chairman noted that a number of suggestions raised by Members were already being taken forward by Officers; therefore was happy to recommend that the proposals as outlined be supported. The Chairman then further recommended that the alternative payment methods be applied to all car parks across the District and the facility for ‘Pay by Phone’ also be included. The Waste & Engineering Services Manager replied that the existing machines already had the facility to accept payment by phone, and the machines installed at the P&D car park to the rear of the Civic Centre were ready to accept contactless payment, a system module just needed to be applied to make this happen.

The Head of Economic Prosperity queried if provision of ‘short-stay’ parking bays had been considered. The Waste & Engineering Services Manager replied that it was considered the current set up worked better as the ‘2 hour’ tariff was popular. Separately to this, Staffordshire County Council had in the past tried to introduce ‘on-street’ parking charges, but had so far been unsuccessful. Where this Council was concerned, the main issue was medium to long term parking charges.

In respect of the ‘payment by phone’ facility, the Head of Environment and Healthy Lifestyles advised that introduction of this was entirely dependent on the procurement timescales being followed by Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

The Chairman noted that there didn't seem to be much challenge coming from the public in respect of the existing car parking charges. The Head of Economic Prosperity replied that there was a perception that places where free parking was offered were seen to be failing; therefore this needed to be taken into account when such considerations were made.

Following the conclusion of the discussion, it was resolved that:

- (A) The proposal to install new ticket machines that provide alternative payment methods be supported, and applied all Pay and Display Car Parks across the District.
- (B) The facility to 'pay by phone' also be supported and rolled out as soon as able to do so.

8. Future Meetings

In respect of the issue of 'ASB and drug activity within the town centre' (as referred to on page 5 of the Notes of the previous meeting), the Chairman advised that he would speak with Councillor P.E. Woodhead, in his capacity as Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee, to see whether or not this issue could be included on that Committee's work programme.

In respect of 'high rents' and the 'Town Centre Partnership', the Economic Development Manager advised that local estate agents and representatives from the Partnership would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group, along with Officers from the Council's Corporate Assets team (in respect of properties within the town centre under the Council's ownership). The Chairman clarified that he wanted in the next meeting to look at how commercial landlords operated and how the Council worked as a landlord in its own right. A Member asked that provision of residential properties within the town centre offer also be considered as part of that discussion.

The Chairman asked that an update also be provided on how work in respect of the 'Cannock Town Centre Development Prospectus' was progressing, accepting that some of the information would be of a confidential nature.

A Member then queried whether any consideration had been given to providing short term lets / 'pop-up' shops in Council owned units in the town centre. The Economic Development Manager replied that this had previously been raised with the Corporate Assets team for consideration.

The Chairman then noted that any final recommendations produced by the Working Group had to be within the scope of the redevelopment work for Cannock town centre.

The meeting finished at 4:50 p.m.

Please ask for: Mrs. W. Rowe
Extension No: 4584
E-mail: wendyrowe@cannockchasedc.gov.uk



Agenda - Scrutiny Working Group (Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates)

Time: 11:30am * *PLEASE NOTE TIME OF MEETING* *

Date: Tuesday 25 February, 2020

Venue: Datteln Room

1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interest from Members

To declare any personal, pecuniary or disclosable pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct and any possible contraventions under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

3. Notes of previous meeting

To agree the notes of the previous meeting held on 9 January, 2020 (enclosed).

4. Review of Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates - Discussion

Local Estate Agents and representatives from the Town Centre Partnership will be in attendance.

5. Briefing note on Council owned retail property and pop up shops

Members will receive information on short term lets/pop up shops (raised at previous meeting)

6. Cannock Town Centre Development Prospectus

Members will receive an update on how the work in respect of the Cannock Town Centre Development Prospectus was progressing

7. Any recommendations of the Working Group

To determine which recommendations Members wish to refer to the Promoting Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 18 March, 2020.

Councillors:

Boucker, A.S.

Fitzgerald, Ms. A.A.

Hewitt, P.M. (Chairman)

Startin, P.D.

Todd, Mrs. D.M.

Wilkinson, Ms. C.L.

Witton, P.T.

Officers:

D. Piper Head of Economic Prosperity

D. Harris Economic Development Manager

A. Haynes Town Centre Partnership Officer

W. Rowe Senior Committee Officer

Date Despatched: 18 February, 2020

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL

NOTES OF THE

**SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP -
CANNOCK TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION
AND OCCUPANCY RATE REVIEW**

TUESDAY 25 FEBRUARY, 2020 AT 11.30 A.M.

HELD IN THE DATTELN ROOM, CIVIC CENTRE,

BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK

Present:

Councillor P.M. Hewitt (Chairman)
Councillor Ms. A.A. Fitzgerald
Councillor Mrs. D.M. Todd

Officers: D. Piper, Head of Economic Prosperity
D. Harris, Economic Development Manager
W. Rowe, Senior Committee Officer

Also present: Graham Wiggin – Fred Pritchard Properties
Rob Waring – Cannock Town Centre Partnership
Angela Haynes – Town Centre Partnership Officer
Paul Brewer – Avison Young
Christopher Davies – Avison Young
Luke Neal – White Rose Properties

9. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A.S. Boucker and P. Startin.

10. Declarations of Interests from Members

Nothing declared.

11. Notes of previous meeting

The notes of the previous meeting held on 9 January, 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

12. Cannock Town Centre Regeneration and Occupancy Rates Review - Discussion

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from Local Estate Agents and the Town Centre Partnership to the meeting explaining that Members were hoping to

obtain a better understanding of the challenges they were facing. He would ask a series of questions and sought the thoughts and ideas of the representatives.

Question – Why do you think units in Cannock struggle to let?

The representatives from Avison Young, who were the lettings agent for the Cannock Shopping Centre, explained that retailers were going through a difficult period. The market had decreased and a number of the national retailers had left the town centre. Retailers had a perceived threat that the opening of the McArthur Glen Designer Outlet (MGDO) would have a negative impact on their businesses. They were attempting to persuade retailers and potential retailers that the pricing levels at the outlet would be at a higher level and this would enable continued trade in the town centre. Some of the national stores had moved from the town centre to the retail parks and high business rates were also a problem in letting properties.

Graham Wiggin, the representative from Fred Pritchard Properties, explained that the occupancy levels for the Pritchard units were almost 98%. Their units were smaller, were available with short term leases and they offered a mix of residential and commercial units. He considered that smaller units were easier to let.

Luke Neal from White Rose Properties added that there was demand from the smaller independent retailers but landlords had to reduce rents in an attempt to let the units. It was difficult to convince prospective tenants to commit to renting a unit.

Paul Brewer, Avison Young, agreed that the smaller units were easier to let and considered that it was better to let a unit at a lower rent rather than waiting for the best covenant.

The Chairman asked if the representatives had considered letting any of the retail units as office/work space. Graham Wiggin explained that the Newall Shopping Centre already offered a mix of units. This included cafes, hair dressers, surveyors, residential apartments, restaurants, a beauty spa and office space. The units also came with car parking space.

Paul Brewer added that there were a few empty units in the Cannock Shopping Centre but he would ideally wish to retain these as retail units if possible.

Luke Neal advised that he had received interest in the empty units from a mix of uses including bars, restaurants and a dance studio; however nothing had been confirmed. Christopher Davies, Avison Young added that having a residential offer within the town centre was important as this would bring in the cafes and restaurants.

Paul Brewer commented that if the Council was able to appoint a developer to undertake a cinema/restaurant scheme on the multi storey site this could change the town centre completely and enhance the night time economy. The Economic Development Manager confirmed that Council Officers were working on the procurement process for a development partner and aiming to commence this

process for later in 2020.

Question - How long does it take to let a unit in Cannock and would anything make a difference to lettings?

Representatives indicated that this would depend on the demand but agreed that the smaller units let quicker than the larger ones. Christopher Davies explained that the national retailers had vacated the larger town centre units and, although the rent and the lease term could be negotiated, the size of the unit could not. These units were too big for the small independent retailers and there was no appetite for the national retailers to let them either. It was noted that the units with a rateable value of under £12,000 were the ones easier to let as these attracted small business rate relief. Paul Brewer made reference to the larger unit on the top floor of the Cannock Shopping Centre that had remained unlet for a number of years. Due to its layout being long it could not be broken down into smaller units. It was also very expensive to convert these types of units to enable them to be let to different types of businesses.

Rob Waring, who had been successfully trading in the town centre for 12 years and was also the Treasurer of the Town Centre Partnership made reference to the Bicester Designer Village and how he considered the town centre there had benefitted from its opening over the last 5-10 years. He considered that the MGDO was a positive and was hopeful that it would increase the footfall in the town centre.

Paul Brewer commented that, from a lettings point of view, there was a perception that the MGDO would have a negative impact on trade in the town centre. However, he considered that there would be a dip in trade in the town centre for the first six months once the Outlet opened. The price point of the goods sold in the Outlet compared to those sold in the town centre would see local shoppers returning to the town. MGDO would attract shoppers from a much wider catchment area. He considered it was important that visitors to MGDO also visited the town centre. Money was available as part of the S106 agreement to make environmental enhancements and provide a bus service to and from the town centre. Graham Wiggin agreed with these comments but added that the town centre offered nothing at present to attract visitors. The Economic Development Manager commented that there was some money available (approx. £100k) to make environmental improvements in the town centre and to make it more welcoming in the short term until a re-development scheme could be secured.

The Chairman made reference to the poor state of the multi storey car park which was very visible when entering the town centre and the need to address the quality of "mothballing". The Head of Economic Prosperity advised that the multi storey car park would form part of any future re-development scheme for the town centre. However, the progression of a re-development scheme took time and the £100k was a start point in making small improvements in the town centre until a developer was appointed. When asked if the car park could be demolished he advised that the Council had limited capacity and resources. The appointed developer would undertake demolition as part of the re-development scheme.

Question - Is there a high turnover of units in Cannock?

Paul Brewer could not provide any figures but commented that the perception was that Cannock was trading as well as similar size towns that faced similar challenges. Christopher Davies added that they had to offer good deals on rent and lease terms in order to attract new occupiers.

The Chairman then asked the representatives from the Town Centre Partnership to advise on the work they were doing to promote the town centre and to outline any events they had planned.

The representatives from the Partnership explained that they wanted to make the town centre more vibrant and had lots of events planned for the coming months. They had been working with other organisations including St Luke's Church, the Rotary Club and the Public Houses to make plans for the forthcoming VE celebrations. There were proposals to have an army tank in the town and for a "fly over" as well as there being flags and bunting on display. In addition there were also plans for food festivals, a summer fete and a Halloween and Christmas event. There were approximately 6 events planned for this year and they were receiving good support from the Council in making the arrangements for these events. The importance of providing free parking on the days these events were taking place was highlighted. The Chairman explained that this could be considered but would need to be costed.

The Group then discussed the Friday street market. Luke Neal commented that he received complaints that the shop owners were not happy about the placement of stalls in Market Hall Street as they were too close to the shop fronts. Angela Haynes commented that there could be a better layout of stalls and moving part of the street market to Market Square could be considered but the practical implications of this would need to be investigated by Officers. It was also considered that the goods being sold on the street market should not compete with existing retailers who were paying rent. The Head of Economic Prosperity indicated that the layout and positioning of the street market would be taken into account during the re-tendering process for the street market operator later this year.

The Chairman then asked the representatives for their thoughts on "pop-up shops". There was a general view that there was not a huge demand in the town centre for these.

The Chairman offered the representatives the opportunity to ask any questions. Luke Neal considered that communication was important with regard to providing information on the future plans for the town centre and any re-development scheme that was secured. Christopher Davies agreed and added that there would be a period of uncertainty until the proposals for any re-development scheme was made public. He considered that it would be useful if the occupiers of the units within the MGDO were revealed as soon as possible. He also added that it would be helpful if prospective businesses could be provided with information on any help/assistance that was available to them to start their business. The Economic Development Manager confirmed that this information was available and well

advertised.

The Chairman thanked the representatives for attending the meeting and for their valuable input.

The Chairman explained that any recommendations the Working Group wished to refer to the Promoting Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 18 March would only be for the interim period before any re-development scheme was secured.

The Working Group agreed the following:-

- (A) The Working Group supported the Cabinet report outlining the proposals for spending approximately £100,000 on environmental improvements in Cannock Town Centre.
- (B) The need to address the quality of “mothballing” in terms of the multi storey car park. It was noted that it was necessary to ensure the site be made safe and secure but also old signs should be removed and replaced with signs that gave a positive idea of any future proposals and a decent barrier should be provided. Some of this was being addressed by the £100,000 for the environmental improvements as outlined above.
- (C) In view of the perceived negative impact of the MGDO the Working Group considered it was important to ensure that there was enough information available in the public arena outlining the reality with the MGDO. Better marketing of the Designer Outlet should be provided and this should show the positives of what it will bring to the town centre; including the plans for providing a bus link to and from the Outlet to encourage visits into the town centre.
- (D) That consideration be given to the location of the Friday street market and the positioning of the stalls as part of the re-tendering process to appoint a street market operator. In particular consideration be given to more stalls being positioned in Market Square and to the better placement of stalls in Market Hall Street as it was considered they were too close to the shop fronts.
- (E) That consideration be given to the feasibility and costing of providing free parking on the days the Town Centre Partnership had events arranged in Cannock Town Centre.
- (F) The need to be flexible regarding the types of units within any re-development scheme so that retail, leisure and residential units were all provided if possible.
- (G) The Working Group endorsed the Cabinet report outlining the recommendations in respect of car parking improvements.
- (H) That a report outlining the above recommendations and proposals be prepared and agreed with the Chairman of the Working Group prior to it

being submitted to the Promoting Prosperity Scrutiny Committee on 18 March, 2020. The report would be presented by Councillor P. Startin at the Scrutiny Committee meeting as the Chairman of the Working Group was not able to attend.

13. Briefing Note on Council owned retail property and pop up shops

The Group discussed the Briefing Note and it was agreed that there was no appetite for progressing this any further.

A Member asked whether Officers could liaise with Local Authorities where Designer Outlets were located. Reference was made to Bicester, Cheshire Oaks, Swindon and Ashford. It was considered that it would be helpful to ascertain the impact on the town centres once the Designer Outlets had opened and to see whether any arrangements had been put in place to ensure the town centres remained vibrant. The Officers confirmed that they were proposing to liaise with Local Authorities regarding tourism but would expand the discussions in this respect.

14. Cannock Town Centre Development Prospectus

The Economic Development Manager provided the Group with an update on the progress of the Cannock Town Centre Development Prospectus. She advised that 58 people had attended the launch on 1 October, 2019. Officers had met with at least 4 developers and the procurement process to secure a developer would commence in the coming months. She could not confirm whether any developers would submit any proposals but the signs were positive.

15. Recommendations of the Working Group

These were outlined in 12 (A) to (H) above.

The meeting finished at 1.00 pm.