



WEST LEEDS REGENERATION PLANS

ARMLEY ' CELEBRATION OF SUCCESS' EVENING TUESDAY 22ND JANUARY 2008

Leeds Ahead were contracted to organise an event that would engage with the local businesses in and around Armley Town Centre. The aim of the evening was to consult with businesses **and** share with them the progress made to date on the West Leeds Regeneration Plans.

These included:

- New Leisure Centre
- New West Leeds High School
- Mistress Lane Developments
- Gladedales Winker Mill developments
- Heritage Trust Plans for refurbishment of the older properties on Town Street
- Public Realm Plans for Town Street
- Improvements to Armley Moor

Leeds Ahead decided that the evening should be one that **CELEBRATED** the progress made on the development plans in the area.

Sponsorship for the evening was sought and the following companies contributed:

- Elite Forwarders
- Premier Farnells
- Boots
- TESCO
- HSBC
- Gladales
- Thinking agency

Raising a total income of **£1,230.00**

The event was announced in the Evening Post on 17th January 2008.

Invitations were designed by the 'Thinking Agency' on a pro-bono basis. They were asked to design a modern new logo for Armley Town Centre.



Armley One Stop Centre kindly agreed to the event being held in the Library and Customer Service reception area.

Invites were extended to LCC Officers from Planning, Business Rates, Inward Investment, Heritage Trust, as well as the West Leeds Community Inspector. Education Leeds had a stand with the plans for the new school; Leisure Services had a stand displaying the design and details of the new leisure centre; Gladedales had the plans and display of their Winker Mill conversion. West Leeds Regeneration Manager displayed drawings of the Mistress Lane's plans, Armley Moor improvements, public realm plans for Town Street and the Heritage Trust developments. Jonathan Morgan agreed to be the 'Guest speaker' for the event.

650 invitations were sent out, and the shops on Armley Town Street had theirs hand delivered by Leeds Ahead. One week prior to the event all the shopkeepers along the Town Street had a personal visit from the Leeds Ahead staff

A local Jazz pianist was booked to play at the event, New Wortley Community Centre produced 'delightful' food for the evening, wine and soft drinks were served.

Packs were produced to give out on arrival as guests signed in which included a questionnaire to complete.

The Event

The evening was a success, 68 business people attended (10 % response rate to invitation), the majority were the local businesses on Town Street, which was the priority group. The informal setting coupled with LCC officers, Leeds Ahead staff and the local police inspector enabled businesses to discuss their views on an individual basis. More importantly we were able to emphasise the vital role that small business can play in making the regeneration plans work.

The Barbers Shop on Town Street won the prize draw and received a bottle of Champagne

Results of the questionnaires have been collated, and actions agreed with the West Gateway Regeneration Manager.

Conclusions:

An evaluation of the event was held with Leeds Ahead staff where the comments and views of the businesses were discussed. It is apparent that the vast majority of the

businesses are concerned about their future and that their trading has declined in the last three years. Some felt that the high cost of business rates were now disproportionate to the area. Despite this, there is an air of optimism and a definite desire from them to remain in business and support the area.

The businesses would like:

- To have a more visible and personal contact from someone who can advise them and keep them informed of local plans and developments and be able to air their issues.
- Would be happy to improve their shop fronts if they felt that it would make a difference and included all shops. The landlords of some of the shopkeepers are not maintaining their properties and the tenants felt that this could be an area where they could get help.
- Advice on how to improve their trading through advertising and promotions in the area.
- Crime is a concern for businesses in the area.

One shopkeeper said that his shop walls were covered with letters he had received from the council in response to his letters, but in seven years he has never had a personal visit from the council. The hand delivered invitation and discussion with a member of Leeds Ahead was the first time he had any personal contact.

Small business support must be a key component to any regeneration planning. Exciting new housing developments and services will never, in isolation, regenerate an area. **Small businesses are at the heart of a thriving community.** The larger businesses in the area need a thriving community in order that they can recruit and engage local people, and West Leeds do have some extremely supportive large businesses, as demonstrated by their willingness to sponsor and attend the event.

Recommendations (concluded as a result of the feedback on the night and the questionnaires):

1. Establish a business network forum for the Town Centre shops
2. Organise quarterly meetings held in the business premises eg Cafes, pubs and clubs
3. Through the quarterly meetings facilitate the production and monitoring of an action plan for the businesses that aligns itself to the areas regeneration plans. This will encourage the businesses to fulfil their responsibilities to maintain their 'patch' and identify those that don't.
4. Develop relationships with the larger businesses in the area in order that their expertise and guidance can be deployed as well as creating demand for the services and goods of the local small businesses.
5. Develop a web-site to keep the businesses informed
6. Establish a magazine that gets circulated to the local neighbourhoods advertising the shops goods and services.
7. Link the activities and support of the community policing team into the network
8. Provide advice and training for small businesses on promotion and marketing of their business

9. Ensure that the issues addressed on the 22nd January are addressed and a response is given.
10. The residual sponsorship money, with the agreement of the sponsors, is used to support the businesses

The creation of a 0.5 post for a Town Centre Manager that would ensure that the above recommendations were implemented and act as the conduit between the business community, the council and the local police. The event on the 22nd January highlighted the positive response and energy that can be elicited from small businesses when they have personal contact and they are listened to.

This post would also be able to work closely with the West Leeds Regeneration Manager to ensure that the forum action plan linked and complimented the West Leeds Gateway Regeneration Plan and that of the West Leeds/Bradford Corridor developments.

Alison Shaffner
West North West Area Manager
8/2/08