

Report of Nigel Conder; Armley Town Centre Manager

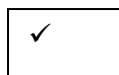
Report to Inner West Area Committee

Date: 22nd June 2011

Subject: Armley Town Centre Manager update

Electoral Wards Affected:

Armley
Bramley and Stanningley



Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

☐

Community Cohesion

☐

Narrowing the Gap

☐

Council
Function

☐

Delegated Executive
Function available
for Call In

☒

Delegated Executive
Function not available for
Call in Details set out in the
report

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Executive Summary

This report provides Members with an update on current issues facing Armley town centre and actions that are planned by the Town Centre Manager (TCM) to address these issues and improve the vitality and viability of Armley town centre.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

This report provides Members with an update on current issues facing Armley town centre and actions that are planned by the Town Centre Manager (TCM) to address these issues and improve the vitality and viability of Armley town centre.

2.0 Background Information

Since the appointment of the TCM nearly 2 and a half years ago there have been many successes. The TCM has delivered the message to businesses that the role is to help and take their concerns seriously and act upon them. It has however proven very difficult to get businesses to be more proactive in becoming actively involved in shaping the future of Armley town centre.

The Armley Business Forums has been poorly attended with no businesses willing to take the lead in chairing this group. This has been more successful in Pudsey where there is active business forum. It is difficult to ascertain why businesses are not becoming more involved and engaging more proactively. Many businesses feel that no matter what initiatives are tried, they are unable to change the fortunes of what they see is a town in crisis. While this apathy exists it is largely down to the TCM to try and change the businesses view point. The TCM feels that if the proposed new super market development goes ahead this could potentially change the future prosperity of the town.

Significant improvements to Armley's wellbeing and security have been made. The Alertbox was a key achievement. This initiative has proven an effective way of getting businesses to support one another. The community based initiatives working with the police, Environmental Action Team and other agencies has improved confidence among the public and retailers although as explained from further on in this report, if this is not maintained on a regular basis the situation will worsen.

3.0 Main Issues

1. Problems with littering
2. Education
3. Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) on Town Street
4. Tensions
5. Future prosperity
6. Events
7. Budgets / fund raising
8. Empty Units

3.1 Problems with littering

Members of the public and traders continue to comment on the poor appearance of Town Street. The TCM agrees that the environmental quality of Armley Town Street is still a problem. Although there is a street cleaner, he only uses a pair of tongs which makes the job of collecting cigarette butts difficult. One of the main comments made by people is the number of cigarette butts accumulating on Town Street. The TCM arranged with Streetscene Services for the delivery of a machine that would suck up the cigarette butts and it was used with great success then withdrawn. The TCM is currently investigating why this decision was taken and has tried to contact Streetscene to ask if the machine could be used again. This issue continues to be a major concern for Armley and something which needs resolving as soon as possible. The other comments are based around the appearance of the pavements. They are dirty and full of chewing gum. Ideally the pavements require more regular cleaning to improve their appearance.

3.2 Education

The TCM is currently working with Christ Church school Armley to educate young children not to drop litter. The campaign is based around designing a poster that

promotes people putting their rubbish in bins and not dropping litter on the floor. The winning poster has been chosen by Cllr Harper and it has been reproduced and posted on the bill board at Branch Road. Plans are in place via a larger campaign throughout the local primary schools in the area with involvement from EAT, to educate small children not to drop litter and create a sense of civic pride.

3.3 ASB Town Street

Traders and the public regularly highlight issues in relation to ASB on Town Street. Traders have commented on the number of people drinking and gathering in large groups. This is happening at various times of the day and includes whole families, some with young children. They are gathering outside the bookmakers and other areas of Town Street. Traders have reported that many of their customers are concerned about coming onto Town Street because they feel unsafe and threatened by the large groups. The TCM is liaising with the Police to try and combat this problem working through the established multi-agency tasking meetings.

3.4 Tensions

Traders have also reported seeing groups of youths from Asian and Eastern European communities swapping verbal insults and goading one another. This is a possible tension monitoring situation which the TCM has reported to the Police. They have said they will put on extra patrols and the issue will be raised by the TCM at the next tasking meeting.

3.5 Future prosperity

The Area Committee may be aware that outline planning consent was approved in principle and the decision deferred and delegated to the Chief Planning Officer subject to several conditions and a Section 106 agreement to include a management fee, travel plan monitoring fee, public transport contribution, bus infrastructure contribution, contribution to signalisation works at Tong Road, specification for works to the former chapel on Town Street and triggers for construction / completion of additional retail units. At this stage it is unclear which operator will take the site.

The TCM has been speaking to the owner of the properties at the bottom end of Town Street (Gain Hold Properties) who own all the units under the canopy on both side of Town Street. He has made them aware that there will be a major development taking place in the centre of Armley which will change the look of the town. On the back of this development they may wish to upgrade their buildings to bring them in line with this new development and make Armley a more attractive place to visit. The TCM is also making them aware of the promotions and events that are held to promote the town, and the efforts that are being made to make the town a better place to visit. He has also highlighted the monies that have been spent so far to regenerate the town through the Town & District Regeneration Scheme.

The TCM has made contact with the production team that makes the Mary Queen Of Shops programme featuring Mary Portas. They have shown an interest in the idea of not just looking at one shop but the town as a whole. Although the talks are still very young, this could really highlight Armley's potential. The background to this programme is that Mary Portas, who has many years experience in the retail sector, comes to a town, and looks at turning the fortunes of an ailing shop around by looking at all the different aspects of how a shop is run and advising on how the business

could improve. She has been very successful and clearly shown that just because a large multiple retailer comes to a town it doesn't necessarily mean that all the existing businesses will be negatively affected.

Summary of Appendices

3.6 Appendix 1: Events

A number of events are planned for this year (see Appendix 1). The Easter event went very well on the 16th of April and in cooperation with Armley Common Rights Trust the TCM is running a number of new events this year. New to this year will be the teddy bears picnics which will be held in Charlie Cake Park. This year the TCM will be concentrating on promoting Armley through these events and working with partners who may wish to convey any messages they have through these activities. Events will be promoted through schools, local community groups and the press.

3.7 Appendix 2: Budgets / Fund raising

The budget this year has been used to organize a number of events. (See appendix 2). The acts the TCM has booked are all very good value for money. The TCM has developed a good working relationship with them which means they will deliver a few extra shows if asked or stay a little longer, they are always willing to be flexible in their approach.

The TCM is actively seeking private funding from businesses to try and ease the burden of always looking to Area Committee for financial assistance. So far there have been a few tentative responses from some businesses.

3.8 Appendix 3: Empty Units

As reported previously there are a total of four empty units on Town Street and four on Branch Road. It is proving difficult to attract new retailers to the town, especially well known high street brands. The issue seems to be the size of the units. Many larger retailers require a minimum square footage which most of the units in Armley do not meet.

These premises may be good for new start up businesses, but again it is difficult to find good start ups that require units of this type and who can afford the initial capital outlay. However the letting agents are now far more receptive to negotiation on the rent for these properties. Other issues that cause many concern are the very high rateable values placed on retail units in Armley. This is a big worry for not only the existing businesses but from any new start ups when they realise how much the rateable values are.

4.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance

Member Consultation

4.1 The TCM regularly liaises with elected Members for Armley, for example through the Armley Initiative and Armley Community Forum.

5.0 Legal and Resource Implications

- 5.1 The TCM post and associated events budget is solely funded by the Inner West Area Committee.

6.0 Equality Considerations

- 6.1 The work of the TCM aims to improve the vitality and viability of Armley Town Street for all sections of the community.

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 The TCM role is now well established in Armley. It has secured a number of successes including trader engagement, new community events and reduced retail unit vacancy levels. However there are a number of challenges still to be resolved, including poor environmental quality, trader apathy and community tensions. The TCM will continue to strive to tackle these issues in partnership with traders and other agencies who also work in the area.

8.0 Recommendations

- 8.1 The Area Committee is asked to note the information set out in this update report and comment on future priorities for the TCM to focus on.

Background Papers

None