

PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION JANUARY 2009: SUMMARY OF RESULTS

1. Introduction

This is a summary of the results of the public consultation and stakeholder consultation undertaken in January 2009 by consultants Colin Buchanan, on behalf of Dudley Council.

The consultation aims to develop an understanding of how Quarry Bank Local Centre works and how it could be improved; to establish an outline Vision of the kind of Local Centre that Quarry Bank could become; and to identify priorities for action and potential solutions. The consultation will inform the development of options for the improvement of Quarry Bank Local Centre. The public will be consulted on these options in March 2009.

Full reports of the consultation events and results are available at www.quarrybank-regeneration.com.

2. The consultation exercise

The consultation exercise comprised of:

- A stakeholder workshop attended by officers from Dudley Council, Sandwell Council, CENTRO, some local community and voluntary groups and businesses, local library and school representatives, and local Ward Councillors.
- A staffed public consultation exhibition for the local community.

The workshop and exhibition were held on 26th January 2009 at the Quarry Bank Community Centre, Sheffield Street, Quarry Bank. Both events enabled participants to identify what they liked and disliked about Quarry Bank as a Local Centre, and to suggest possible improvements. They were asked to comment on the most important priorities for action.

The stakeholder workshop was advertised by direct mail to stakeholders from a list of organisations and individuals agreed with Dudley Council. The public exhibition was advertised by letters to local businesses, leaflets/posters in the High Street, an article in the local press, and a notice on Dudley Council's website.

42 people attended the exhibition (evidenced by the signing-in register), and 19 people attended the stakeholder workshop.

3. Key Issues emerging from the Public Consultation

The public consultation identified a range of issues about what is good about Quarry Bank Local Centre, what needs improvement, and what the most important improvements would be.

The key issues for the Regeneration Strategy to address are:

Local Services

A strong message came through about the importance of local services to the role of the High Street and its contribution to community life. It was felt that the gradual erosion of services was undermining the viability of local shops the role of the High Street as a shopping destination. The loss of the public toilets was a major concern. Suggestions were made about how to be creative in the way that local services are provided in the area, in a way that supports local retailers. The potential to link in with the development of the Children's Centre at the school was also highlighted.

Traffic and Transport

Heavy volumes of traffic, congestion and street parking were identified as key issues affecting the High Street and surrounding roads. There were some suggestions about how certain junctions could be improved to ease traffic flow, with a strong message that a by-pass should not be considered. Other transport improvements included cycle lanes, more direct bus routes and better pavements and crossing facilities

Community and Identity

The public consultation identified a strong sense of community spirit and affinity with the local area amongst local residents. There was a feeling that the area had a friendly atmosphere, and that the contribution of local people was important to this character. The range of local services and quality, specialist shops also contributed to the identity of the Local Centre, which was considered to have survived despite competition from other centres.

Environmental improvement

The quality of the environment was highlighted as a concern. This ranged from issues about enhancing shop fronts, maintaining the heritage character of shops but not at the expense of security, improving pavements, providing benches and CCTV, and improving the quality and frequency of street cleaning and drains in the wider area.

4. Key issues arising from Stakeholder Consultation

The stakeholder consultation identified a range of issues about how well Quarry Bank currently works as a Local Centre, what deficiencies it has, where there is scope for investment and improvement, and how a regeneration plan could build on local people's vision of the area and their aspirations for the future.

The key issues to be addressed in the development of a regeneration strategy are:

Historic Character

The role and function of Quarry Bank has changed over time, but it has a strong sense of history, especially amongst older residents. The area has connections with early developments in the industrial history of the Black Country, and features some locally listed and historic buildings in the High Street. This historic character is integral to the area's identity. Stakeholders felt that this character should be enhanced to develop the area's identity, and provide a framework within which a clear role and stronger function could be developed for Quarry Bank.

Role as a destination

The role of the Local Centre as a destination for shopping, services, leisure and education is framed by its historic role as the 'lifeblood' of the community. This role is derived from its historic sense of community, but is being eroded as a result of competition from other shopping areas, the loss of local services, poor accessibility and a degraded environment. Investment is required in a range of areas – historic environment, local services, traffic congestion alleviation, public transport improvements, and community facilities – to encourage private sector investment in the retail offer and create a destination that provides a complementary role to neighbouring centres, and hence is viable and sustainable in its own right.

Local Services

The provision of local services is a key role for Quarry Bank Local Centre. As the High Street has historically been the heart of the community, its role as a meeting place and place to access services is under threat because of the closure/downsizing of key local services at Quarry Bank. Local people now have to switch to other destinations. Increased footfall and use of the High Street could be encouraged by improving the physical fabric of the buildings and improving shopfronts, enhancing the historic character, providing/enhancing facilities for community uses, and working with public services and others to increase the range of services available locally.

Environment and accessibility

The condition of the environment and accessibility of the High Street is an important factor in the role and function of Quarry Bank Local Centre. The poor pedestrian environment and traffic congestion, coupled with the natural slope of the land and parking issues, discourage shopping visits. Public transport through the area needs to be improved, and its role in creating a perception of a distinctive shopping area should be considered through provision of appropriate bus routes and information about the location.

Strategic Investment and partnership

There is significant social capital in Quarry Bank, with an active voluntary and community sector, business sector and school. The regeneration strategy for the area needs to assess the potential for re-dressing loss of services and investment, through a deliverable plan based on partnership with other bodies with a long-term stake in Quarry Bank Local Centre and access to resources and investment.

5. Priorities emerging from Consultation

The issues and priorities identified in the consultation exercise suggest that the most important issues for the Regeneration Strategy to consider are:

- Improvements to environmental quality, appearance and the fabric of the High Street, e.g. enhanced shop fronts and buildings, conservation of historic elements, improvement of the pedestrian environment, and cleaning.
- Retention/attraction of a range of local services, e.g. post office, banking and investment in community facilities.
- Measures to reduce traffic congestion and improve accessibility by public transport and on foot.

6. What Happens Next?

The results of the consultation have provided a fuller understanding of the key issues in the area, the aspirations of stakeholders and the wider local community, potential solutions and priorities for investment.

These results will be used to inform the development of draft options for the regeneration of Quarry Bank Local Centre. These options will be subject to further consultation in March 2009.

7. Where can I get more information?

This summary report, and the full reports of the workshop and public exhibition, is available on the project website www.quarrybank-regeneration.com.

The website will be updated from time to time with details of the next consultation exercise.

Any other queries or comments may be sent by email to consultation@cbuchanan.co.uk or by post to:

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