CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 24TH MARCH 2021

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GROWTH AND REGENERATION

UPDATE ON THE GUNGATE REGENERATION QUARTER PUBLIC CONSULTATION

EXEMPT INFORMATION

N/A

PURPOSE

To update the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on findings of the Gungate Regeneration Quarter Consultation which sought the responses from the public on the future of the Gungate site during February 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

Corporate Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the results of the Public Consultation on the future of the Gungate site and the proposed next steps.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background to the consultation

A “virtual” public consultation on the future of the Gungate site was carried out during February 2021. The consultation was a continuation of the Council’s regeneration planning for the Gungate site.

Since 2019 the masterplanning of the site has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the success of the Council in obtaining a Future High Street Fund grant contribution of £22m towards the £38m regeneration programme on the area of Tamworth town centre next to the Gungate site. This public consultation exercise provided an opportunity to reassess the future of the Gungate site in the light of the public’s views along with these recent changes affecting Tamworth town centre.

Form of the consultation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was only possible to carry out a virtual consultation using the Council’s website. A consultation document posing various questions

based on the masterplanning work carried out in 2019 was provided on the website (Appendix 1) along with a “Questions and Answers” document. (The consultation website included an on-line form for asking questions and making comments) In order to assist the consultation process the consultation document included various plans and visualisations showing how the Gungate site could be developed.

The questions posed by the consultation were:

QUESTION No	CONSULTATION QUESTION
1	Do you think a mix of uses is appropriate for this site?
2	Can you think of other uses that might work?
3	What would you like to see in a new Leisure Centre?
4	Are you aware of any other constraints (obstacles) that may present challenges for the development of the site?
5	On the basis of your local knowledge, can you think of any other key characteristics, requirements and opportunities that should be taken into consideration in developing the site that haven’t been identified?
6	What uses do you think should not be next to each other?
7	What do you think about the idea of having taller and larger buildings to the north: lower and smaller buildings to the south?
8	Would the routes shown make it easier to get around the area and, in your experience, do they provide the most direct route? If not, please explain why?
9	Do you think that this new road layout would be an improvement?
10	How do you think public transport could fit into the site?
11	What would you like to see in any new public open space? (For example, types of surfacing, types of trees, public art, small amenity areas with seating)
12	What do you think about having residential development in the Gungate Regeneration area?
13	Do you prefer a contemporary or more traditional design approach for housing in this area?
14	What sort(s) of housing would you like to see within the Gungate site?
15	Other comments and questions
16	Respondent Information

A collation of the comments received at the half-way point of the consultation along with an interim questions and answers document was published on the Council’s website on the 15th February. The aim of providing an interim response during the consultation period was to allow responders to see the comments and questions received by that stage of the consultation and so allow a certain amount of interaction within the consultation process. The final versions of the Comments Received and Questions and Answers documents were published on the Council’s website on 12 03 2021.

Response to the consultation

The Comments Received and Questions and Answers documents are provided (Appendices 2 & 3) along with two separate documents that were sent independently to the Council in response to the consultation (Appendices 4 and 5).

Given the restraints imposed by a virtual consultation the response has been very good both in terms of the quality and quantity of the responses. It is clear that there is great interest in how the Gungate will change in the future. The virtual consultation

had responses from 197 residents, 4 town centre businesses and 3 visitors. In addition 5 respondents wrote directly to the Council. Some of the comments were lengthy and comprehensive and the Comments Received document extends to 137 pages of comments on the various questions posed by the consultation document. All of the questions posed elicited a good response with Question 2 receiving the maximum response (16 pages) while Questions 4, 8, 9 and 14 received the minimum response (seven pages). Some of the responses (such as the 12 pages on new public open space or the 10 pages on what should be in a new leisure centre) are overflowing with ideas.

Support for all the regeneration proposals can be found within the responses with only 10% of respondents against the idea for a mixed-use development on the site though it would be fair to say that all respondents supporting a mixed-use development had their own view of the ideal mix of uses.

There was general support for an attractive night-time economy of high quality restaurants and bars. There was also general support for pedestrianisation and for improved links with Tamworth train station.

However there were also challenging disagreements for all the regeneration proposals. The significant challenges expressed by the public have been summarised below and, in most cases, these challenges represent the need for political decisions that take into account the conflicting aspirations, practical problems and commercial considerations that apply to the Gungate site.

A summary of the challenges expressed through the public consultation to the current regeneration proposals is provided below:

General Issues

Mixed Use: one strongly expressed viewpoint is that focusing on residential development would give the remaining town centre businesses a chance of a sustainable future. Since 2008, Tamworth's national retail ranking has fallen from 219th to 782nd and Tamworth town centre has been demoted in the national retail hierarchy from being a town centre to being a local centre. A possible conclusion from this is that the town centre needs to shrink to a size proportionate to being a local centre. As stated in one of the responses; "we should not consider this space as a commercial space. This is an opportunity to shrink the footprint of our town centre and bring residents closer to a renewed smaller centre giving it have a chance to survive."

The Multi Storey Car Park: the Council's proposals are based on developing the surface car parks and replacing the lost car parking spaces through the construction of a Multi Storey Car Park (MSCP). If you object in principle to a MSCP then the options for development and increasing the density of economic activity at the Gungate site are greatly diminished as the options are then focused solely on the opportunities surrounding the existing surface car parks. Basic objections to a MSCP ranged from inappropriate size, ugliness, underuse of the Ankerside MSCP, perceptions of personal safety and preferences for public transport.

Heritage: it is impossible to understate the importance of "heritage" in the responses. For example the Almshouses are mentioned 88 times in individual responses and the loss of heritage buildings in the 60's and 70's was a point raised in the responses to many questions. A wide range of suggestions were made to promote Tamworth's heritage (including the demolition of 60's and 70's buildings) and Tamworth was often

compared unfavourably with Lichfield in terms of heritage conservation. The Council was essentially challenged to not repeat the mistakes made in the 60's and 70's and to create something that added to Tamworth's heritage appeal.

Sustainability: the Gungate site was seen as an opportunity for the Council to achieve its green ambitions through the incorporation of sustainable features such as; electric vehicle charging, solar power, district heating, ground source heating, electric scooters (such as those currently on trial in Stafford), low carbon building materials and a greater emphasis on public transport. Not to future-proof any development with sustainable features would be viewed as a failure by the public and there was a general view that the issue of sustainability was not given sufficient importance in the regeneration proposals.

Lighting: the issue of lighting and how it affects the atmosphere in the town centre was mentioned in a number of responses along with the need to include public safety considerations into any design. The need for architectural quality was repeatedly emphasized.

Specific Points

Residential development generated the full range of opinion from 100% in favour to 100% against and, in terms of housing tenure, from 100% social housing to 0% social housing. Responses to questions on design favoured the traditional rather than the contemporary but views on flats versus terraces versus town houses were inconclusive. With regard to compatible uses the public's views coincided with the regular considerations applied by the environmental health and planning departments; for example noise, scale, light etc. Later living accommodation, in particular, was thought to be detrimentally affected by noise nuisance and late night entertainment whereas commercial use would be relatively unaffected.

There was interest in the provision of medical services and health related businesses on the site from both the public and Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. This use had been listed in the Consultation document but the public's responses suggest that greater consideration should be given to this form of development.

The MSCP, leisure centre and hotel proposals had a mixed response (an underground car park was mentioned favourably more than once). The demand for a new leisure centre was thought to be unproven and potentially non-existent due to the existing leisure facilities at the Snowdome, Strykers Bowling and various gyms and schools. Similarly, the existing hotel provision in the town centre was considered to meet demand.

Traffic in general and in particular the Bell Junction was considered to be a potential problem along with the availability of parking and the cost and pricing strategy for parking.

On the issue of the size and height of new buildings not everyone was convinced that because of the height and size of the existing buildings north of Spinning School Lane, any new development there can be of a similar height and size. The buildings surrounding Gungate are all of a small, domestic scale and alternative proposals were to return to the scale of this area prior to the developments in the 60's and 70's.

The question of a new bus station split opinion evenly. A new bus station is not currently included in the regeneration proposals and opinions are divided between the benefits of having two points to the east and west of the town centre for

accessing bus services to the benefits of centralising bus services to a new bus station on the Gungate site. The advantages and disadvantages for both arrangements were expressed.

One comment of social interest was the strong support expressed for maintaining some provision for youth as originally provided at the Staffordshire County Council Youth Services building and leisure area. This was mentioned throughout the public responses – particularly in relation to the original charitable intentions associated with the land.

Next Steps

Following on from the regeneration work carried out by the Council to date and the results of the public consultation on the Gungate site the Council's objectives for the site can be summarised as:

1. To bring forward the regeneration of this key development opportunity at the heart of the town centre.
2. To bring forward a development that helps to renew and reshape the town centre. To do this in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability.
3. To build on Tamworth's existing strengths (e.g. its historic assets such as the Almshouses) and its recent successes, including the Tamworth Assembly Rooms and the award of Future High Street Funding.
4. To use existing Council assets as a foundation for future change.
5. To secure a financial return (capital/revenue) for Tamworth Borough Council, given their existing assets within the site.
6. To shift the focus of the town centre – moving away from prioritisation of retail, giving people new reasons to visit and use the town, including encouraging residential uses.
7. To diversify uses to bring new activity and use of the centre at all times of day.
8. To work with the community, partners and stakeholders to ensure a sustainable future for Tamworth.
9. To provide a town centre for all – encouraging use of the town from people of all ages.
10. To allow for innovation – providing enough flexibility in planning and programming of spaces to allow for entrepreneurial ventures and adaptation to change.
11. To use public-sector interventions to stimulate private-sector investment.

The outcome of the regeneration planning for the Gungate site will not be a fixed masterplan with specific sites allocated to specific uses but rather an agreed set of uses and a set of criteria to assess future development proposals. These assessment criteria could include such issues as heritage, transport and sustainability which were strongly reflected in the public consultation.

Officers are considering the delivery options for achieving change at the Gungate site including the options of; Joint Venture / Development Partner, Direct Development and Freehold Disposals and are looking at the differing constraints and opportunities represented by these different delivery models.

The next steps for the Council will therefore be:

- To investigate further the delivery options
- To investigate the possibilities for external grant funding
- To assess the market demand for the various agreed site uses.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are none to complete the recommendations set out in this report.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

No implications.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

No implications

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

No implications

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

See executive summary.

REPORT AUTHOR

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Gungate Consultation Document 2021

Appendix 2 Gungate Consultation Comments Received 06 03 2021

Appendix 3 Gungate Public Consultation Q & A

Appendix 4 Individual Gungate Consultation response

Appendix 5 TDCS Gungate Consultation response