

Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting: 16 April 2009

Portfolio: Planning and Economic Development

Subject: Town Centre Partnerships

Responsible Officer: Councillor Mrs A Grigg

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry (01992-564246)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To note this report on the Town Centre Partnerships as requested at the March 2009 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Background

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse has raised a number of matters concerning the operation of the Town Centre Partnerships (TCP). I set out first the content of an email from her dated 18 March explaining these:

“Some weeks ago in the members' room I saw a leaflet from the Waltham Abbey TCP, which invited residents and anyone who worked in the town to their AGM. It made me realise that I never hear anything from the Epping TCP. I thought it would be interesting to find out if the other TCPs are as open to the community as WATCP is so I asked for reports at Council.

When these reports were given some TCPs sounded very active but Epping and Loughton seem to be in difficulties. I was particularly concerned to hear Councillor Rolfe, in his report on the Epping TCP, say that it had no intention of involving the community. It sounded as if that TCP was aiming to become a trade association only.

I recall the TCPs being set up and I served on the Epping one for about 3 years. The aim I thought was to encourage the vibrancy of the towns through bringing together business, voluntary organisations, residents and town and district council representatives. I am wondering if the TCPs were given terms of reference by EFDC as the council set them up and has funded them. Also, is there any annual report to the council/Portfolio Holder and bidding for the grant or is it automatically given? Where the TCPs are not performing satisfactorily is anything done? Is there a forum where the TCPs come together where good practice can be shared?

I think all TCPs should produce an annual report which is available on the EFDC website with their membership, attendance and terms of reference. This should also be sent to the Portfolio Holder. It would be helpful if other councillors could be informed perhaps through the Members Bulletin that these reports had arrived. I also

think all TCPs should publicise their AGM and invite members of the community - I think some in addition to WA said they did.”

Report

1. On 31 March the new website for the Epping Town Partnership www.eppingtcp.com was launched, and I commend Members to have a look at its contents.

2. Set out below a short briefing on the history of the Town Partnerships within the District; it is certainly true that their activities and their nature has changed over the years, but there are regular meetings which I and appropriate Officers from EFDC attend with the Chairmen of the six Partnerships.

3. In order to address and support the vitality and viability of town centres, local authorities were tasked with setting up Town Centre Partnerships. With the increase of town centres becoming privately owned, but with many environmental responsibilities resting with local authorities, Town Centre Partnerships took a multi agency approach with representations from both private and public organisations with involvement and an interest in the various environmental, economic and tourist issues relating to town centres.

4. Epping Forest District Council, in the 1990's looked to set up partnerships in each of the six main centres; Loughton High Road, Epping, Waltham Abbey, Buckhurst Hill, Loughton The Broadway and Ongar. The partnerships, to remain at 'arms length' from the local authority were set up with the aim to bring together traders, businesses and other key stakeholders to:

- Support the economic prosperity of the centres and businesses operating within them;
- Promote the centres and the attractions available for residents, visitors and investors;
- Establish and deliver activities to positively promote and enhance the offering of the centres;
- Bring together town centre stakeholders to improve communication and act as a consultative body for a variety of organisations.

5. To enable the partnerships to be effective, each year they are supported through financial support and officer resource. In particular the Town Centres Officer and the Economic Development Officer.

6. Currently, EFDC provides support in the form of an administration grant of £1,000 per partnership. Whilst some use the grant for secretarial support, others receive these services in-kind and put the grant towards activities being delivered by the partnership. This sum is given providing the Partnership is active; it is not automatic.

7. In addition, a bid can be made for a Special Projects Grant of up to £2,000 per partnership (for a three-year period) to deliver activities to the benefit of the centre. Previously, the SPG fund was £6,000 with bids up to £2,000 but this was successfully increased to increase the benefits and outputs of activities and allow each TCP to access funding. These funds are only given if there is a bid, and outcomes of bids are monitored.

8. Over the years each partnership has grown, evolved and adapted to the needs and requirements of the area and the committee members involved. As a significant stakeholder and contributor to the partnership, EFDC have been revising a protocol for the Town Centre Partnerships, outlining the minimum requirements for a partnership to operate and run as an independent partnership. (Copy of draft attached)

9. At present, each of the six Town Centre Partnerships are at different stages and operating at varying levels for the benefit of the town centre and the town itself.

10. At the end of this report is a short synopsis of current issues.

11. Turning back to Councillor Mrs Whitehouse's points;

- a) I hope that Councillor Mrs Whitehouse, and others can make good use of the new website for the Epping TCP, and that the website helps to improve communications about what it is doing.
- b) Epping had waned rather a while ago, and its solution was to concentrate on business interests, rather to attempt to continue with a wider focus.
- c) The activities of the six Partnerships are discussed at the meeting held with the Chairmen; usually on a six-week cycle, and the Protocol is being updated, and deals with many points to which attention has been drawn.
- d) Where Partnerships have struggled they have been supported to refocus and return, and the regular meetings are partly intended to enable them to be supportive of one another.
- e) Whilst recognising that an annual report of each Partnership might be desirable, the level of funding for these Partnerships needs to be kept in mind.

[Chairmen contact details (email) can be supplied on request.]

Loughton High Road

Unfortunately currently has one of the lowest trader attendance throughout the six partnership. Only proponent members include representation from St Mary's Church, Town Council and Loughton Residents Association.

A set of aims and objectives have been developed for the partnership and echo those of other TCPs:

Bring together public, private and voluntary organisations with an interest to improving the High Road;

Engage with traders and organisations;

Develop and co-ordinate projects and initiatives that have a positive impact and will

Promote and market the town centre for the benefit of traders and businesses;

Create a voice for traders and businesses in matters relating to future policy and developments.

The partnership understands that trader engagement is a priority with the majority of activities looking to address this. A TCP newsletter is currently being produced for all traders and businesses and looking into holding a business networking event. Howzat Cricket Festival is also being planned for the Summer 2009, with increased links with and into the town centre and building upon the success of the previous three events held.

The partnership is also looking to work with the Loughton Festival to develop a project to run in conjunction with the festival and as a long-term project.

Chair - Peter Sheen

Epping

Similarly to Loughton High Road, the partnership saw a dramatic fall in trader engagement and changes to the make-up of the committee. Now, with two traders taking the lead a new partnership has developed with the aim to focus and support traders and businesses and promote Epping as a shopping destination.

The partnership is producing website and newsletter promoting both the partnership and Epping and looking to develop a number of promotional tools/campaigns to highlight Epping and what it has to offer (in conjunction with the new website). It is envisaged that the partnership will also deliver best practice and training/networking events for traders and businesses.

Chair – Barry Seager

Waltham Abbey

The partnership has evolved into a town partnership with representatives on the partnership from both the private and public sector, voluntary and community organisations and residents, working across the town rather than just the town centre area.

The partnership is keen that its aims target residents, businesses and visitors by:

- i) Encouraging employers to take both an interest in the town and to provide opportunities of local employment;
- ii) Providing information, networking opportunities and promoting the town and business centres to support essential inward investment;
- iii) Highlighting the history and attractions Waltham Abbey has to offer, producing and advertising annual tourist leaflets at venues throughout Essex and London and working towards improved signage and information boards throughout the town.

Key projects for the partnership include co-ordinating the production of a tourist guide/map; look to establish visitor interpretation boards and improved signage at key attractions; organise/host quarterly business networking breakfasts for local businesses, organise the annual Shop Window competition for local retail traders and hold weekly press briefings providing an opportunity to highlight and promote activities of the partnership and Waltham Abbey and for the press to find out/ask questions.

Chair – Norma Green

Buckhurst Hill

The partnership's committee has seen the most frequent changes over time but retains the commitment from a few traders and businesses. It is understood that creating a strong and vibrant partnership is a priority especially as the infrastructure of Queens Road creates two distinct areas and currently sees the partnership having engagement and trader 'buy-in' predominately from those in Lower Queens Road.

An action plan is currently being developed with trader engagement, promotion and branding and delivering events/alternative markets as the main priorities. The current Chair and Treasurer of the partnership will be stepping down at the AGM in May (due to six month sabbatical and semi-retirement), this provides an opportunity to re-launch the partnership and develop further the aims and objectives.

In previous years, the partnership with support from EFDC have organised several Green festivals and although may not run in 2009 is keen to expand the events taking place in the area.

Chair – Trevor Hunt

Loughton The Broadway

Similarly to Waltham Abbey, The Broadway Town Centre Partnership has extended its membership to include public and voluntary organisations, residents and includes The Broadway Traders Association.

With The Broadway functioning as a community shopping centre with the majority of its custom coming from residents, the partnership has evolved into community partnership organising events within the centre for the benefit of the local community. The partnership also support traders in liaising with councils at town, district and county levels to improve and environmental and infrastructure issues.

The partnership have continued to organise the annual Debden Day and Christmas Lights community fun days as well as several Business Breakfasts with the latest

showcasing the new Epping Forest College campus in partnership with Epping Forest College, Epping Forest District Council and Epping Forest Chamber of Commerce.

Chair – Dave Stannard

Ongar

As a traditional market town within the most rural area of all the centres. Ongar TCP evolved into the Ongar Forum embracing the community feel of the area and developed a forum for all the community to be involved with.

Like The Broadway, Ongar acts as a centre serving local residents and the Forum has found success in developing a number of community events and initiatives that have enabled them to become self-sustaining. The Forum organises a variety of events throughout the year and takes the lead on Christmas and Guy Fawkes celebrations. It also produces it's own monthly newspaper and has developed improved signage within the centre.

Due to the Forums self-supporting, community focus this has seen a drop in the level of engagement with the district council, however is going to be addressed through the Town Centres Officer role.

Chair – Ian Goodman