

Planning Committee

19 March 2008



**Derwentside District Council Local
Development Framework - Stanley
Town Centre Area Action Plan: Issues
and Options**

Report of Rod Lugg, Head of Environment and Planning

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To advise the Committee of a consultation by Derwentside District Council on Stanley Town Centre Area Action Plan: Issues and Options document. When finalised the Area Action Plan will be a Development Plan Document forming part of the Local Development Framework for the area. Members are asked to endorse the attached schedule in Appendix 2 as the County Council's formal response. Copies of the consultation documents have been placed in the Members' Resource Centre.

Background

- 2 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires each District Council to prepare a Local Development Framework consisting of a number of spatial planning documents to replace their existing District Local Plan. Each Development Plan Document (DPD) will go through a number of stages of statutory consultation before being adopted, Issues and Options being the first stage. The Planning Committee agreed responses to Derwentside's Core Strategy Issues and Options Report in March 2007. The Core Strategy is required to set out the long term spatial vision for Derwentside and the strategic policies required to deliver that vision. That Report suggested various options as to how Stanley Town Centre could be improved. The County Council's response supported a mix of options a) and d), improving the environment and layout of the shopping area and encouraging more choice of food and non-food shops. The District Council was also asked to have regard to policies for good design including CABE advice "The Value of Good Design".
- 3 Area Action Plans are used to provide the planning framework for areas where significant change, for example regeneration or conservation is needed. Stanley has long been recognised as requiring regeneration and the Town Centre plays an important role in achieving this. A key feature of Area Action Plans is to focus on implementation.

Stanley Town Centre Area Action Plan: Issues and Options

- 4 Derwentside District Council is inviting comments on this first stage of developing issues and options for the Stanley Area Action Plan. The document summarises the relevant national, regional and local policy context including the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy, the County Durham Strategic Vision, the Derwentside Community Strategy and the Consultation Draft County Durham Economic Strategy. The document discusses the key findings arising from earlier consultations and evidence base work and provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the town centre. For the purposes of the Area Action Plan 15 character areas are identified some of which include specific development opportunity sites.

- 5 The document sets out a Vision and Strategic Objectives for the Town Centre which are worthy of support. The Report goes on to suggest three **Spatial Strategy Options** and asks which option is the most appropriate approach for the future development of Stanley.
Option 1 - Minimal intervention / Piecemeal development
Option 2 - Consolidate retail area
Option 3 - Improvements to the whole centre.

Option 1 would not result in a clear planned strategy but would continue the current situation of the District Council reacting to new developments as they come forward. Option 2 has the merit of concentrating improvement efforts on the core retail area. However, from the County Council's point of view, I would suggest, that only Option 3 to consider the wider Town Centre would allow issues such as accessibility – particularly pedestrian and cycling, environmental improvements, design code, and the potential education use of the Kings Head site to be adequately tackled. The document recognises that Option 3 would require significant additional resources to implement many of the suggestions.

- 6 The County Council's suggested response to the other identified issues is covered in Appendix 2. The outcome and results of this consultation, supported by evidence gathering, will help inform the preparation of the next consultation stage of the Stanley Area Action Plan which is Preferred Options.

Conclusions

- 7 The development of Issues and Options represents the first formal stage in preparing an Area Action Plan for Stanley. The most significant issues from the County Council's point of view are considered to be improving the vitality, viability and attractiveness of the town centre and ensuring accessibility and parking issues are fully addressed. The health of the town centre is a key factor in ensuring that Stanley maintains its role as one of the County's main towns, acting as a significant location for employment, services and housing for its own residents as well as serving the surrounding villages.

Recommendation and Reasons

- 8 The Committee is recommended to endorse my comments in Paragraph 5 and Appendix 2 as the County Council's formal response to the consultation on the Stanley Town Centre Area Action Plan: Issues and Options.

Background Papers:

Derwentside District Council Local Development Framework Stanley Town Centre Area Action Plan: Issues and Options February 2008

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

(Does the decision impact upon a future Unitary Council?)

The Government has urged local authorities in areas affected by future Unitary Authorities not to delay preparation of LDFs and it is important for the County Council to continue to respond to District Council consultations in the interim.

Finance

None.

Staffing

None.

Equality and Diversity

None.

Accommodation

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Sustainability

All policies within the Stanley Town Centre Area Action Plan will need to reflect the sustainable development objectives in Derwentside Local Development Framework Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

Human Rights

None.

Localities and Rurality

The Area Action Plan focuses on Stanley Town Centre but its role includes serving the surrounding rural area.

Young People

The planning system promotes community involvement including that of young people.

Consultation

Derwentside District Council requires a response on the consultation document by 4 April 2008.

Health

The Plan refers to planning approval for the relocation of the Health Centre, creating a new modern health facility for both children and adults.

Appendix 2: Durham County Council's Response to Derwentside District Local Development Framework: Stanley Town Centre Area Action Plan: Issues and Options

AAP1. Is the geographical area to be covered by the Area Action Plan appropriate?

Yes, welcome the additional areas included at Louisa Terrace and the listed church buildings on the northern edge of the Plan area, in response to County Council officer comments on the working draft in January.

AAP2. Are there any other development opportunity sites that should be included in the Area Action Plan?

Welcome the recognition, on pages 15 and 24, of the County Council's preference for a more central location for Stanley Library to increase its accessibility. However joint working is needed by the District and County Councils to identify a new site in the Action Area Plan, before the development potential of the existing library site east of the A693 can be realised.

Vision and Strategic Objectives**VO1. Does the suggested vision reflect the needs and aspirations of the residents, visitors and businesses of Stanley Town Centre?**

Option a) The County Council supports the Vision for the Town Centre.

VO2. Do you think the draft objectives are appropriate for the Stanley Town Centre Area Action Plan?

The County Council supports measures to create a sustainable mix of retail, service, community and residential uses in the town centre. These uses should include local convenience and comparison retail facilities and new town centre residential accommodation to avoid the domination of the town centre by the redeveloped Asda Superstore

The County Council supports measures to create a high quality, well designed, safe and integrated centre. However the AAP needs to give more consideration to how pedestrians access the town centre. The issues of the A693 dividing the town from local residents, underpasses, parking and the 'length' of Front Street are all considered at various points in the AAP, but there does not seem to be a consistent approach to working out where parking will be, whether it will be free or if there will be a charge, how and why local residents might use the centre, where traffic will be contained/restricted, and so on. Promoting pedestrian access and public transport and managing parking demand, are vital matters that the strategy must tackle. What implications will parking at Asda have for the 'local indigenous' traders and shops at the northern end of Front Street for example?

Shopping

SH1. What do you think about the size of the shopping area in Stanley Town Centre?

Decisions need to be informed by up to date evidence. The County Council supports the stated intention to commission a new retail assessment to assess the current performance of retailing in Stanley and future requirements and capacity.

SH2. Which one thing would most improve the shopping experience in Stanley town Centre?

Better quality shops would enhance the vitality and viability of the centre as well as environmental improvements. Page 12, 5th paragraph mentions trying to attract multiple retailers which can act as “anchors” for other, perhaps local and small scale retailers to orientate round. The likelihood of multiple retailers locating in Stanley and which retailers the town centre would benefit from needs to be investigated.

SH3. Are there any factors that discourage you from visiting Stanley Town Centre at night?

This is a matter for local residents rather than a strategic policy issue.

SH4. Which area(s) of the town centre should be the next focus for retail improvement and regeneration after the Asda scheme?

Given the vacant units and low retail activity levels at the northern end of Front Street, new retail and business functions should be concentrated at the southern end of Front Street. In the future, if the southern end of the town becomes more successful, regeneration efforts could then turn to the north.

Housing

SH5. Do you think Stanley Town Centre would benefit from having more people living within it?

Yes provided housing does not sterilize the potential for redevelopment for retail and commercial uses such as in the Clifford Road area, which is recognised in the document as one of the primary shopping locations but suffering from vacant and outdated shop units.

SH6. Do you think Stanley Town Centre would be a suitable location for affordable housing?

Yes in principle, but the percentage of affordable housing should be supported by evidence of housing need and the results of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment process.

Environment

SH7. Do you think Stanley should have a Local Listing of important buildings?

Yes. It is noted that the most popular buildings, the Council Offices and the former Co-op building are both historic. The Town Centre strategy should recognise the good stock of architecturally and historically interesting buildings in Stanley and make provision for their repair and re-use. A local list of important buildings would raise awareness and offer recognition to the best.

The raising of design standards is essential. It is important that a leap is taken from accepting the mediocre to only accepting the highest design quality. All new buildings should in future make a positive contribution and not just a neutral contribution to the town and should also meet sustainable construction and high energy efficiency standards. This will require strong leadership and determination. Design briefs for development sites should be prepared. Environmental best practice should not just be encouraged; it should be a fundamental requirement of any new development. Stanley bus station has already set a new standard for environmental best practice.

SH8. Do you think there should be more signage in and around Stanley Town Centre?

Design of the town centre can make the town centre more legible, easier to navigate and reduce the need for signage so a key objective of regeneration schemes should be to keep signage to a reasonable minimum and avoid clutter.

SH9. Do you think there should be clear Gateway markers raising the awareness of Stanley?

Comment as for SH8.

Transport and Communications

SH10. Do you think traffic should be reintroduced onto Front Street?

The document states that it has been suggested that trade in the Town Centre has suffered as a result of the pedestrianisation and that the re-introduction of traffic would increase trade. This is not the opinion of Durham County Council. With regard to the desirability of the reversal of pedestrianisation at the north end of Front Street, it should be noted that vehicular access is possible currently via demountable bollards to this shared use (but predominantly pedestrianised) area of Front Street. Durham County Council as Highways Authority remains to be convinced of the actual merits of re-introducing traffic to this section of Front Street. Is the cited lack of activity not due to quality of existing 'offer' and attractiveness of Stanley generally rather than pedestrianisation? It is important to get to the actual and not perceived root cause. Pedestrianisation in itself is not a reason for downturn in turnover of adjacent businesses. Elsewhere pedestrianisation has been shown to result in the reverse outcome, i.e. encouraging footfall and greater spend.

The quoted RPS report was a retail needs study and the basis for inserting the attributed findings from it in relation to traffic matters (page 25) is questioned.

SH11. Is the amount of car parking provision in the Town Centre too little/about right/too much?

The only options put forward relate to absolute numbers. Another method of giving priority to short stay parking (ie the type helping to sustain the economic vitality and viability of a commercial area) is by charging or having maximum stay duration limits and these need to be considered as options. The District Council's most recently commissioned off-street parking study for Stanley and Consett recommends that off-street parking charges are made in conjunction with complementary on-street parking measures by the County Council. The fact that free parking in Stanley is deemed very important to visitors is undermined if this same popularity means convenient short stay parking becomes increasingly difficult to find.

At page 27 and page 33, reference is made to loss of car parking spaces at Clifford Road, site of the future Health Centre, and the need to ensure adequate parking provision essential for the town's vitality and viability. A location for any new car park needs to be chosen in relation to usage patterns, links to the town centre, and any charging regime to be implemented. In the future both off-street and on-street parking will be the responsibility of the Unitary Authority.

Spatial Strategy Options

SS1. Which Option is the most appropriate approach for the future development of Stanley?

The County Council supports Option 3 on improvements to the whole centre (see para 5 of covering report). The County Council agrees with the identification of the Kings Head site (page 32) as a preferred location for any future merged school/ academy and that a development brief should ensure the highest quality of design including improved pedestrian and cycle links to the town centre, and recreational open space to benefit school children and the wider community. The reference on page 17 to the County Council Offices on Front Street as a potential development site (most likely for offices), given that Social Services have relocated, is also supported and this needs to be picked up in the strategy options.

Reference is made on pages 18 and 33 on the need for highway improvements at the traffic lights at Oxhill to relieve congestion. The A693/C11 South Moor traffic signals effectively work at full capacity at peak periods. A recent outline planning permission was granted by the District Council for housing at Oxhill Farm which included the principle of A693 carriageway widening works on the northern side of junction (on District Council-owned land). This will permit an additional lane, though the important east-west A693 link means this will remain a busy junction with peak period congestion nevertheless.

Further issues and comments

Page 11, 4th paragraph, agree that the town centre needs some recreational open space, but the AAP should say how these areas add to the quality of the town centre or how they might be linked to the use of the town centre by locals/visitors.

Page 18 para 14, refers to the **Modus** proposal for the redevelopment of Asda and the likely transport implications. An initial discussion took place in September 2007 between County Council Highways officers and Traffic Consultants retained by Modus, with regard to a future Transport Assessment (TA) scoping report; the latter being to formalise the extent of the TA's coverage. No contact has been made by the Consultants since. The possible closure of the link road between Asda and Front Street will only be considered in the light of traffic surveys and a robust Transport Assessment. The County Council's desire is to reach consensus prior to public consultation on the planning application in order to avoid any needless public concern.

Detailed comments on wording

Page 5 The reference to RSS Policy 6 for the Tyne and Wear City Region needs to be updated to reflect the Secretary of State's Further Proposed Changes (February 2008). The policy supports "the regeneration and development of Stanley for sustainable growth".

Page 6 The sub-regional economic strategy should be referred to as the "Consultation Draft County Durham Economic Strategy" as that is the current document the reference is quoting from.

Page 11, 3rd paragraph mentions loss of trade and employment to retail centres including 'Gateshead'. The paragraph would benefit from specifically naming the Metro Centre.

Page 26 It is not entirely accurate to say the Local Transport Plan identifies Stanley as a Town Centre requiring "physical revitalisation". The reference from page 42 of LTP 2 is to the context provided by the Single Investment Plan of the County Durham Economic Partnership which identifies Stanley as one of the town centres requiring significant investment in physical revitalisation. In relation to improvements to cycling and walking provision, page 30 of the LTP refers to Policy 52 of the Regional Spatial Strategy which seeks to increase the level of cycling and walking accessibility to public transport hubs in the regeneration towns which includes Stanley. The LTP2 Area Programmes support walking and cycling in Derwentside as a whole.

Page 36 URRI stands for the Urban and Rural Renaissance Initiative.