

Altrincham Strategy Consultation Report (May 2014)

1. Background

- 1.1 Securing the successful regeneration of Altrincham Town Centre is a key priority for Trafford Council. The Council has prepared the draft Altrincham Strategy to provide a coherent framework to assist in realising the transformation of the town centre over the next 10 years. The Strategy seeks to draw together a number of separate pieces of work completed in relation to Altrincham over recent years and establish a comprehensive vision for the town centre. It provides an overarching framework for the delivery of development opportunities within Altrincham and will also help support future formal planning guidance for the town.
- 1.2 Trafford Council invited representations on the consultation draft Altrincham Strategy for an 8 week period from 17 February to 13 April 2014.
- 1.3 The Council adopted its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in 2006. This sets out the process by which the Council will consult appropriate bodies in the course of drafting all documents that are part of the Local Development Framework. Whilst the Altrincham Strategy is not a formal planning document the consultation has been carried out in accordance with the broad principles of the adopted SCI.

Altrincham Town Centre and Market Survey (2012)

- 1.4 The draft Altrincham Strategy has taken full account of the findings from the Altrincham Town Centre and Market Survey Report which was commissioned in Summer 2012 and collated over 500 survey responses.
- 1.5 The key findings from this piece of work were as follows:
 - Residents are looking for a more up-market town centre offer than that currently provided. Respondents highlighted a lack of fit between the current town centre offer and Altrincham's market town heritage and affluent population.
 - Reducing the number of vacant shops was identified as a key improvement required.
 - Improving the range of shops and overall appearance of the town centre would encourage people to spend more time in Altrincham.
 - People would like to see more specialist retailers in the town centre and Altrincham Market.
 - The quality and distinctiveness of the market offer was cited as a major shortcoming of the current town centre offer.
 - There was no consensus amongst respondents in relation to where the heart of the town centre is, although Altrincham Market was most frequently identified.
 - Making better use of the market was a strong theme cutting across many of the more detailed suggestions.

- A disconnection of the market from the rest of the town centre was identified.
- There is a need to make more of the town's heritage and restore the market town feel of Altrincham. Comments highlighted a strong sense that Altrincham has lost some of its character and market town feel.
- Design and heritage concerns were raised frequently alongside concerns about the quality modern buildings.
- There was no consensus in relation to whether homes should be built in the town centre.
- Events and festivals were highlighted as having a role to play in increasing footfall in the town with a wide ranging programme required to meet the needs of all age groups.

2. Consultees

2.1 The Council has formally consulted the following key stakeholder groups in relation to the draft Altrincham Strategy:

- local resident bodies and community groups;
- town centre organisations;
- local businesses;
- local politicians;
- land and property owners;
- developers;
- highway authorities;
- statutory consultees and agencies, eg. English Heritage, the Environment Agency;
- public funders, eg. Homes and Communities Agency;
- local service providers, eg. the Trafford Clinical Commissioning Group,
- registered providers of social housing;
- utilities companies; and
- transport providers eg. Transport for Greater Manchester.

2.2 Neighbouring authorities of Trafford were also invited to make representations regarding the Altrincham Strategy in accordance with the Council's 'Duty to Co-operate' obligations.

2.3 In addition the Council notified relevant consultees listed on both the Strategic Planning and Altrincham Forward databases.

3. Formal Public Consultation

3.1 A questionnaire was prepared to record feedback on the consultation draft Altrincham Strategy. This was made available on the Trafford Council website. Hard copies of the questionnaire and Strategy document were also made available in Altrincham Library and the Altrincham Town Team office.

3.2 On commencement of the public consultation of 17 February 2014 a press release was issued by the Council resulting in articles in the local press and a piece on BBC Radio Manchester. A dedicated page on the Trafford Council

website was launched detailing the consultation process along with links to the Altrincham Strategy document, an information leaflet and an online questionnaire. An email notification was sent to all relevant contacts.

- 3.3 Council staff at the Altrincham Town Team office provided opportunities for members of the public to ask questions throughout the consultation process. A dedicated email address, altrinchamstrategy@trafford.gov.uk, was set up to take representations, comments and queries.

4. Representations Received

- 4.1 The consultation questionnaire was available for completion online on the Trafford Council website. Hard copies of the questionnaire were also made available at the Altrincham Town Team office and Altrincham Library.
- 4.2 Written Correspondence was sent to: Economic Growth, Trafford Council, Trafford Town Hall, Talbot Road, Stretford, M32 0TH. Representations by e-mail were sent to: altrinchamstrategy@trafford.gov.uk. The deadline for comments to be made was 13 April 2014.
- 4.3 In total 46 representations were received during the consultation period via both the questionnaire and stand-alone responses. Consultation responses are a matter of public record and open to public scrutiny. A full record of the consultation responses can be viewed at Appendix 3.
- 4.4 A summary of the main issues raised by the respondents is set out below.

Overall Approach

- 4.5 The majority of the responses received have been positive. A clear majority have stated that they agree with the proposed approach to the regeneration as set out in the draft Strategy. There is clear support for the regeneration of the town centre with a particular emphasis on the transformation of Altrincham Market, introduction of a wider mix of non-retail uses including residential and improvements to the physical environment and public realm.
- 4.6 However there are some concerns expressed around a number of areas including the ability to tackle existing empty retail and commercial units, town centre car parking, protection and enhancement of Altrincham's historic character, and attraction of more independent businesses. Furthermore there is a need to ensure the Strategy recognises the challenges town centres face from changing shopping patterns and trends, particularly the impact of the internet. It is also suggested that the reference to Dunham Massey Estate is strengthened to recognise its role as a major tourist destination.

Vision and Objectives

- 4.7 A clear majority agreed with the proposed vision and objectives. Whilst the vision and objectives are well supported it is suggested that the Strategy would

benefit from a greater emphasis on quality, both of retail and leisure offer and in the physical environment. There is also a concern that there is insufficient emphasis on redeveloping existing empty retail and commercial units for alternative uses such as residential or small business space. It is suggested that objectives need to cover a wider scope of town centre activities including events, education and health. There should also be a stronger reference to businesses and the role of the visitor economy within the vision and objectives.

Strategy Area Boundary

- 4.8 57% supported the proposed Strategy Area boundary with 13% disagreeing and 30% responding with don't know. A number of comments were made about key spaces of facilities that fall outside the Strategy area such as Stamford Park, John Leigh Park and the Garrick Theatre. It is also suggested that the difference between the Strategy Boundary, Town Centre Quarters and proposed Conservation Area boundaries could lead to confusion and there should be a clear rationale for each.
- 4.9 A clear majority of respondents agreed with the identified Town Centre Quarters. However some concerns were raised about the function of these designations, specifically in the case of the Evening Economy Quarter where the boundary includes some existing residential areas.

Development Opportunities

- 4.10 There is broad support for the identified development sites and their proposed uses. A summary of views by development site is set out below.

Market Quarter

- 4.11 There is strong support for placing Altrincham Market and the surrounding areas at the heart of future plans for the town centre. It is recognised that this forms a key part of Altrincham's heritage and distinctive identity. A number of comments relate to the need to provide enhanced outside space to support this area, improvements to connectivity with the wider town centre and Altrincham Interchange, and the requirement for appropriate parking and loading facilities.

Altair

- 4.12 There are a number of specific comments on the Altair scheme with some concerns expressed around the likelihood of delivery. There are a number of other points raised regarding the proposed use mix with concern that this should complement rather than compete with existing town centre units and sports provision at Altrincham Leisure centre should be retained.

Stamford Quarter

- 4.13 There is support for the consolidation of high street retailers within a tightly defined retail core centred on the Stamford Quarter. There are representations on the need to continue the later phases of the Stamford Quarter

redevelopment around the existing House of Fraser (Rackhams) store to provide a more consistent retail scheme and improved physical environment. The frontage of the Stamford Quarter opposite Altrincham Interchange is also identified as being in need of significant improvement if it is to function as an attractive town centre gateway.

Grafton Centre

- 4.14 There are limited representations made on the Grafton Centre, although the need to improve the quality of the offer within this development is identified. This development site is located within the Boutique Quarter for which there is some support but concerns are identified that for this to successfully attract quality independent operators, business rates would need to be affordable and pedestrian access and parking improved.

Altrincham Hospital

- 4.15 There are limited representations made on the new hospital, which is currently under development. However, a concern is raised around the parking/drop off space that will be available at the new hospital. The ability of a hospital to attract additional retail expenditure to the town centre has also been questioned.

Altrincham Interchange

- 4.16 The Altrincham Interchange development and integration of multiple modes of transport should be given greater prominence in the Strategy as a key part of proposals for the town's future. There are also a number of comments on the need to ensure that buildings in the immediate vicinity of the interchange are also redeveloped to provide an effective town centre gateway.

Residential Development

- 4.17 There is strong support for the proposals to increase residential development within the town centre, especially where this is focused on utilising vacant retail and commercial space. There are some concerns expressed around the potential impact on car parking and pressure on community infrastructure, such as schools, if significant new residential development does take place in the town centre.

Public Realm and Movement

- 4.18 58% supported the proposed public realm and movement improvements with 21% disagreeing and 21% responding with don't know.
- 4.19 The provision of improved public realm and routing of through traffic away from the town centre is supported. However there are some concerns around how this will work in practice, particularly the concept of shared space. There are a number of comments on the need to ensure any works to public realm and movement have adequate parking provision and ensure safe pedestrian access

to the town centre. A requirement is identified for additional references to cycling and a strategy for delivery and servicing vehicles.

5. Modifications and Next Steps

5.1 Following the close of the public consultation the Council will prepare a revised draft of the Altrincham Strategy. All consultation responses received will be fully considered and taken into account in making modifications to the Strategy.

5.2 It is recommended that the following modifications be made:

- The vision and objectives include a stronger reference to businesses and the visitor economy.
- Additional detail has been added setting out more clearly the rationale for the Strategy Area boundary.
- The Strategy identifies how connectivity with areas located outside the boundary, which nevertheless form part of the town centre offer, will be enhanced through improvements to signage.
- Further reference to the role of Dunham Massey and Altrincham's schools has been added to the section on assets.
- The challenges and opportunities section includes additional reference to the specific challenge of changing shopping patterns and the impact of the internet.
- The function of the identified Town Centre Quarters has been clarified.
- Additional detail has been added to the Market Quarter development to identify how new uses will operate at this location and connectivity improved with the wider town centre.
- The development mix now proposed at the Altair scheme has been clarified.
- Updated information has been included on the development opportunity at the Stamford Quarter following the disposal of this asset by Aviva.
- Further information has been added to the Grafton Centre development opportunity linked to the emerging public realm and movement proposals for George Street.
- Additional detail has been added to references to the new hospital development in relation to the proposed drop off and servicing arrangements.
- Greater prominence has been given to the role of Altrincham Interchange throughout the Strategy.
- Reference has been made to the buildings in the immediate vicinity of Altrincham Interchange and their role in creating an attractive town centre gateway.
- Additional detail has been added to the Strategy on the approach to tackling vacant retail and commercial units and bringing these back into active use.
- A separate strategy will be developed to provide additional detail on how residential development will be brought forward in the town centre.
- Further public consultation will be undertaken on the proposed public realm and movement improvements as the detailed design work is completed.

- A specific Signage, Parking and Access Strategy will be prepared for the town centre.