



Report to Cabinet

Subject To inform Members of the proposed Masterplan for Arnold Town Centre

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1. Purpose of the Report

To inform members of progress towards developing a masterplan for the area of Arnold bounded by High Street, Croft Road, Front Street and Cross Street.

2. Information

The car park adjacent to Asda and the Council's Leisure Centre currently provides parking to meet a range of needs ranging from general shopping to use of the Leisure Centre and other local facilities. It provides short stay car parking of up to three hours duration. A report to the Direct Services & Property Portfolio Holder on 12/11/04 effectively proposed that consideration be given to reviewing the use of the car park with a view to establishing its development potential and that authority be given to appoint consultants for the preparation of a development brief for the site. The report also authorised the Estates and Valuation Manager to effectively seek expressions of interest from ASDA and other appropriate developers in a proposed joint venture arrangement for the redevelopment of the Council's car park.

A clearly identified constraint is that the area should continue to meet the diverse needs of existing and future users. The actual car park site is 4420 sq.m (1.09 acres) in size.

During November 2004 the car park site, in isolation, was advertised for 'expressions of interest' to establish the level and type of demand for a redevelopment site in this location. Over 70 organisations requested details that resulted in 20 submitting indicative development proposals for the site. Many of the responses were from known national developers who were generally suggesting a mixed development of retail/commercial and residential. However, there was also interest from local developers and adjoining landowner's such as ASDA. All the parties were keen to expand the site if possible, particularly to include those properties on Front Street and Cross Street.

This exercise has shown both the high level of interest for investing in Arnold and the demand for a larger site.

A meeting of relevant officers was convened to consider how the proposal could be taken forward taking into account the above and an initial approach was also made to Nottingham Regeneration Ltd. (NRL) to see if funding would be available to assist with the development of the proposal. This took into account a previous presentation by NRL to Cabinet offering to assist with the development of difficult or important sites using their expertise at no cost to the Council. Officers subsequently met with 2 representatives from NRL and agreed in principle to expand the boundaries of the proposal to consider the northern block of the town centre bounded by High Street, Croft Road, Front Street and Cross Street.

This block contains the Council's Leisure Centre, the Library, the Leisure Centre Car Park, Croft Street Car Park and Croft Street toilets as well as a range of existing businesses including Asda and those fronting onto Front Street. Although it is anticipated that only the Leisure Centre Car Park will be impacted upon it was recognised that planning for the whole block could provide a more sustainable development proposal than simply considering the main car park in isolation. This also reflects the view being put forward by developers interested within the site and, with respect to the Leisure Centre, was part of the recommended option accepted in the first report to the portfolio holder.

In any event the existing Leisure Centre is already experiencing increasing maintenance costs as a result of failure of key components within the building. The study would therefore also present an opportunity to consider how the centre could be redeveloped, if this proved to be financially feasible.

The key constraint of retaining public car parking was also identified and initial discussions considered ways that the development potential of the land could be maximised. For example a development containing sub surface car parking, ground floor retail development and second floor housing, particularly if the latter were developed as car free, would not only enhance the car parking but also improve the retail offer and provide high density accommodation in the town centre in accordance with the Council's policies. The issue of being car free development reflects the central location. Such developments have been very successful elsewhere in the country and would represent a major sustainable development which Officers feel should be put forward for national recognition if developed. This would also have the benefit of maximising the use and value of the site that would be important if the Leisure Centre site were to be involved within the proposal to ensure that a replacement centre could be afforded as part of the development costs. Another consideration could be a replacement health centre facility incorporated into the development that may attract LIFT funding.

It should be stressed that these are simply examples of what could be considered rather than statements of intent with relation to the site. It is important that for such a significant site within the town centre that appropriate consideration be given to a range of uses that will benefit the town centre and enhance its economic vitality. A further consideration for widening the scope of the project is the perceived weakness of the northern end of the town centre in

retail terms. It is heavily dependent upon ASDA as the anchor store for the north end and there is a perception amongst some traders that there has been a steady drift of business to the southern pedestrianised part of the town centre with a commensurate increase in charity shops etc. taking up the retail shortfall in the northern part. The wider area could be important in creating a sense of place and identity for the northern end of the town centre and hence helping to redress the balance between the different parts of the town centre.

It was also agreed that a bid be submitted to the Greater Nottingham Partnership (GNP) to assist with the overall costs of the study. The aims and objectives of the bid are defined as:

To commission a masterplan to set a development framework for the area paying particular attention to the land occupied by surface car parking and exploring opportunities for adjacent sites.

The purpose would be to demonstrate the town centre's potential including the amount of new development the area could accommodate. The study will include a delivery mechanism and seek to establish the economic viability of any proposed schemes. The application requests an allocation of grant to fund the proposed masterplan, which is envisaged would be undertaken by consultants on behalf of the Council.

The overall intent being that the masterplan provide a framework for development and support the planning case to ensure that Arnold builds upon its existing success as a retail area and its potential contribution to the local economy is maintained and realised.

In particular the project is intended to meet the following key aims:

- To encourage inward investment from new businesses locating in the Arnold area
- Retain and facilitate the expansion of existing local businesses
- Create new jobs and encourage uptake by local people
- Support the local economy
- Improve the perception of the local area and improve business/investor confidence
- Promote efficient use of land and energy
- Reuse a previously developed area

Further work will be necessary to formulate an initial development brief for the site. It is intended that this brief be developed by officers in conjunction with NRL Ltd and agreed with the portfolio holder. Initial consultation on the brief would then take place with key stakeholders, including a presentation on the brief and proposal to the Arnold Local Area Forum. This brief would then be used as a basis for selecting consultants to undertake the study in accordance with the objectives outlined above. It is anticipated at this stage that selection of consultants would be by a member panel. Discussions will also need to take place with the County Council to determine what outcomes, if any, be included for the library. Careful consideration will also need to be given to the design

element of any proposal given the location of the site and the potential mixed use that it could be put to.

It is recognised that the proposal is likely to generate significant public interest and accordingly it is proposed that as part of the overall study the consultants undertake further consultation on the proposal, particularly with local businesses. This would allow more detailed input, especially from those businesses potentially affected by any development proposals. It would also provide a further opportunity to reassure both local businesses and the public that overall car parking provision within the town centre will be maintained.

3 Resource Implications

In total a bid of £55,000 has been submitted. The Council had already identified a sum of £20,000 for this purpose and this will be used as match funding within the bid. The proposed timescale is to have the study completed by April 2006.

An Officer working group, comprising the Estates and Valuation Manager, Town Centre Manager, Community Partnerships Manager, Local Plans Manager and the Deputy Chief Executive, is providing the internal staffing resource to oversee the project with support from NRL. This group reports to the portfolio holder for Direct Services and Property.

4 Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report.