



## Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Report of: The Task and Finish Group  
Date: 11<sup>th</sup> January 2006  
**Open**

### Stourport Forward

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 Stourport Forward is a Company Limited by Guarantee that has been formed to utilise the £500,000 "Market Towns Initiative" (MTI) funding distributed by Advantage West Midlands (AWM), in a similar way that "Opportunity Bewdley" has worked within Bewdley.
- 1.2 At its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2004, the former Economic and Regeneration Task Group considered and noted the initial aims, objectives and project proposals of Stourport Forward.
- 1.3 The Task Group was also advised that the meeting of the then former Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Environment and Development) would receive a presentation from Stourport Forward at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2004.
- 1.4 At its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2004 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Environment and Development) received a briefing and presentation regarding the development of Stourport Forward. The Committee noted the development of Stourport Forward's Strategic Action Plan, the proposal to appoint a Programme Manager and to develop an Implementation Plan, on which Members would be fully consulted.
- 1.5 It was decided that a report on the progress on Stourport Market Towns Initiative would be brought before the Committee annually.
- 1.6 The work of the former Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Environment and Development) (including the work of the former Economic and Regeneration Task Group) now sits with the present Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel and the Task and Finish Group that has been formed to scrutinise Stourport Forward.

## **2. Summary of Position to Date**

- 2.1 Stourport Forward appointed a Programme Manager in January 2005.
- 2.2 The Programme Manager, who is formally employed by British Waterways, has been working with Advantage West Midlands and local partner organisations to develop a draft Implementation Plan.
- 2.3 The following is a summary of the draft Implementation Plan - the full version of which has been submitted to Advantage West Midlands for approval. Full copies of the full draft Implementation Plan are available on request. At the time of writing, Stourport Forward is currently waiting for the Implementation plan to be approved by AWM.

## **3. Summary of “Stourport Forward’s” Draft Implementation Plan:**

### **3.1 Stourport Forward Vision:**

***“Stourport Forward encourages the active participation of all residents, businesses and organisations in regenerating Stourport-on-Severn and the surrounding area and will seek partnerships with statutory agencies and other organisations in order to support and realise their objectives on behalf of the community.***

***Stourport Forward will, throughout, recognise the needs of all groups in helping to implement measures that ensure Stourport-on-Severn develops its unique assets as a town for business, local services, shopping and leisure, and is attractive to residents, surrounding villages and visitors.”***

### **3.2 Objectives and Aims:**

- a) Making the town more accessible and safer for those travelling by public transport, car, on foot, by cycle and those with mobility and other special needs;
- b) Establishing good communications for Stourport Forward with the wider community;
- c) Making the town more attractive, well cared for and secure for businesses and visitors;
- d) Promoting the town for business and tourism development;
- e) Promoting local awareness of the environment within the community;

- f) Targeting the needs of specific sectors of the community: the elderly, young people, the isolated, vulnerable and disadvantaged;
- g) Seeking improvement to the delivery of local community services and support for community organisations;
- h) Seeking improvements in the scale and scope of public transport to make it a quality service;
- i) Creating conditions for economic growth and expansion of business opportunities.

### 3.3 Project Proposals:

Below is a list of the projects Stourport Forward is aiming to support along with the amount of MTI funding proposed to be drawn down and the amount of partnership funding proposed to be allocated.

#### 3.3.1 Funding Table

Project Number	Project Title	MTI Funding allocation	Partnership Funding
101	<b>Restoration of Stourport on Severn Canal Basin</b>	<b>£200,000</b>	<b>£2,971,687</b>
102	<b>Revitalisation of Sandy Lane Industrial Estate</b>	<b>£112,900</b>	<b>£188,100</b>
103	<b>Stourport Pride Feasibility study</b>	<b>£15,000</b>	<b>£5,000</b>
104	<b>Learning Opportunities</b>	<b>£15,000</b>	<b>-</b>
105	<b>Wheels to Work</b>	<b>£12,000</b>	<b>£9,020</b>
106	<b>Manor Farm Ball Court</b>	<b>£4,000</b>	<b>£47,000</b>
107	<b>Business Incubator Study</b>	<b>£5,000</b>	<b>£5,000</b>
108	<b>Farmers Market</b>	<b>£2,000</b>	<b>£2,000</b>
109	<b>Garden Refurbishment at the Methodist Church</b>	<b>£4,000</b>	<b>£8,500</b>
111	<b>Community Chest</b>	<b>£23,100</b>	<b>-</b>
112	<b>Administrator</b>	<b>TBC</b>	<b>-</b>
113	<b>Programme Manager</b>	<b>TBC</b>	<b>TBC</b>

## **4. The Review**

- 4.1 At the Panel's meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2005, The Panel carried out a scoping exercise for the scrutiny of Stourport Forward. Members agreed to appoint a small Task and Finish Group to carry out the scrutiny exercise. It was proposed that the Group would meet two or three times with the Economic Development and Tourism Manager to review progress to date and gather relevant background information. Once it had considered all of the evidence, the Group would bring its draft recommendations to a future meeting of the Panel.
- 4.2 The Chairman suggested that Opportunity Bewdley should be used as an example for Stourport Forward and that the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group should be arranged once the scrutiny on Opportunity Bewdley had been completed. *(NB: The recommendations from Opportunity Bewdley were reported to the Panel at its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2005).*
- 4.3 The Task and Finish Group comprised Councillors Mrs Fran Oborski (Chairman), A J Buckley and Mrs J L Salter.
- 4.4 The Group met twice, the first time on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2005 to agree its terms of reference and to consider the current situation with regard to Stourport Forward, and 18<sup>th</sup> October 2005, when it received feedback from the Economic Development and Tourism Manager on a number of issues that Members had previously raised.
- 4.5 The Group's terms of reference were agreed as follows:
- To update Members on the progress of Stourport Forward.
  - To consult Members in the development of the draft Implementation Plan.
  - To ensure Members continue to support Stourport Forward's activities.
- 4.6 The following is a summary of the Group's discussions at both of those meetings. The Group felt that the following format would be the easiest way for Members of the Panel to understand the projects that Stourport Forward is involved with.

### **4.6.1 Project Information**

#### **101 Restoration of Stourport on Severn Canal Basin**

- a) British Waterways will be managing this project which aims to use the canal basin as a catalyst to stimulate sustainable economic regeneration in Stourport-on-Severn and the surrounding area.
- b) The canal basin restoration project is a key element of the regeneration of Stourport-on-Severn, which centres on the area from the former Carpets of Worth site to Bridge Street.

- c) The project content will range from restoration of historic buildings, landscaping of the area to promoting the educational potential of the area. This is the largest project that Stourport Forward are involved with, with a considerable amount of match funding, largely due to a heritage lottery award.
- d) A £200,000 grant representing 6% of the total funding has been identified.

## **102 Revitalisation of Sandy Lane Industrial Estate**

- a) Sandy Lane Business Association is working in partnership with British Business Parks (an AWM funded regeneration company specialising in the regeneration of industrial estates) to utilise this funding opportunity to develop a programme of improvements that create a high quality working environment encouraging inward investment. Infrastructure improvements will be made within this project, such as road re-surfacing, CCTV installation, improved lighting, new signage etc. The investment from Stourport Forward will be used as an incentive grant scheme encouraging private companies to match the investments that will directly benefit them.
- b) As part of its review, the Group considered a site plan which identified which roads within the Sandy Lane development are currently adopted, and those which are unadopted.
- c) Members noted that many of the roads were currently potholed and problematic. They were interested to note that one of the projects is to provide a pavement along Sandy Lane.
- d) In response to a request for the actual costed figures, the Economic Development and Tourism Manager reported that the allocated Grant was £112,900 (over 3 years) with £92,500 being capital funding and £20,400 being revenue funding. Match funding would comprise £188,100.

## **103 Stourport Pride feasibility Study**

- a) A consultant led feasibility study is to be conducted to advise on the enhancement of key public realm areas including the town centre and canal basins area. Wyre Forest District Council officers from Forward Planning, Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services and the Economic Development sections will draft up the Project Brief.
- b) The Study will provide proposals for improving signage, street furniture and lighting.

#### **104 Learning Opportunities Project**

- a) A project will be developed to evaluate the need for additional learning resources in Stourport-on-Severn. Members of Stourport Forward will try and take these needs into account, by providing local training courses and/or transport to the nearest available courses.
- b) The Group noted that the pilot scheme proposed the following:
  - The formation of a steering group to oversee the project
  - Research into Stourport-on-Severn's learning requirements
  - To consider project options
  - To deliver 'trial' courses using existing venues and/or minibus
  - To develop innovative ways to deliver learning opportunities to hard to reach groups
  - If appropriate, to develop a learning skills project application and identify match funding
- c) Members felt that it was important not to raise local residents' expectations.
- d) From the £15,000 allocated to the project, it is proposed that £7,500 will be revenue funding and £7,500 will be capital funding.

#### **104 Wheels to Work**

- a) This project focuses on the issue of transport in the town. The scheme aims to provide young people on a low income with the ability to travel to work. A scooter hire project has been established by Worcestershire County Council and will be supported in the Stourport-on-Severn area.
- b) £12,000 has been set aside for a 'Wheels to Work' project which, over 3 years, will help to provide affordable scooter hire to people on low incomes (particularly young people) to enable them to travel to work or education centres, where they would otherwise be excluded due to the poor public transport links.
- c) The Group noted that applicants must demonstrate that they have a job offer or offer of an education/training placement. Insurance, training and basic health and safety equipment would be provided.
- d) Three scooters will be allocated to Stourport-on-Severn residents. Members noted that this scheme is also a partnership with Opportunity Bewdley.

#### **105 Manor Farm Ball Court**

- a) This project is addressing a need on one of the public housing estates in the town where anti-social behaviour has been the result of a lack of play areas. This ball court development aims to provide a diversionary activity that will enable the young people of the area that have requested the facility, the opportunity to play ball games in a safe and secure environment.
- b) Young people will benefit from a £4,000 multi-use ball court on the Manor Farm Housing Estate, This will be managed by the Community Housing Group – formerly Wyre Forest Community Housing – as well as Community Action Newtown, the Police and Youth Service.
- c) Members were pleased to note that the project will help some way towards encouraging social involvement on a housing estate within Stourport-on-Severn, where anti-social behaviour is prevalent.

#### **107 Business Incubator Feasibility Study**

- a) Members were informed that this would have comprised a consultant led study to assess the viability of business incubator units for business start up purposes within the town of Stourport-on-Severn. Wyre Forest District Council Officers would have been involved in drafting up the Project Brief.
- b) However, the Feasibility Study was no longer proceeding, as Advantage West Midlands was undertaking a review of managed work spaces across the whole region.

#### **108 Farmers' Market**

- a) This project is aimed at providing Stourport and its hinterland fresh and affordable healthy produce. The support of this venture will enable the market group to purchase weatherproof signage that will encourage the local people of Stourport-on-Severn and neighbouring areas to support the event.
- b) Members agreed that the Farmers' Market is proving very successful.

#### **109 Garden Refurbishment at the Methodist Church**

- a) The church garden is an open space close to the town centre. To operate alongside the current building refurbishment, the improvements to the garden aim to open it up for public use.
- b) he project will revitalise the garden following the completion of the works to the fabric of the church building.

- c) Funding has been approved and the works are scheduled to commence December 2005.
- d) The aim is to bring the space into more community use creating a safe 'oasis' in the town centre.
- e) Members agreed that the garden refurbishment at the Methodist Church was an important feature for the community.
- f) In response to a request for the actual costed figures, the Economic Development and Tourism Manager reported that the allocated Grant was £4,000 (over 1 year) which comprised capital funding. Match funding would comprise £8,500.

#### **111 Community Chest**

- a) This project will enable local groups to apply for small grants for community projects.
- b) The scheme will improve the quality of life for local people by supporting, enabling and empowering volunteers and projects, which are for the benefit of Stourport-on-Severn and/or contribute to its growth and development.
- c) £23,100 is being set up to offer small grant awards of up to £500 to local community groups during the next 3 years.
- d) Grants may be awarded to projects for up to 75% of the total project costs.
- e) The allocated grant type is revenue and comprises £24,900 (to December 2007) and £4,100 during 2005/2006. Match funding will comprise 25%.
- f) Members agreed that careful policing should be carried out, and were pleased to note that a number of criteria has to be fulfilled before any project is recommended for a grant.

#### **112 Administrator**

- a) Funding is to be made available to employ a part-time Administrator to support the work of Stourport Forward's Programme Manager.
- b) The joint post will cover the Markets Town Initiative programme and the canal basin project with British Waterways.
- c) Members noted that the hours and costings for the post are still to be confirmed.



### **113 Programme Manager**

- a) The Programme Manager is responsible for co-ordinating the Market Towns Initiative programme and Implementation Plan.
- b) Members noted that the Programme Manager is currently employed for 32 hours per week.

## **5. Conclusion**

- 5.1 The Stourport Forward programme is due to operate until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008, with continual assessments being made on all of the projects.
- 5.2 Wyre Forest District Council is supporting the partnership, with both Members and Officers playing important roles within the group.
- 5.3 It is the aim that Stourport Forward will be able to use their funding from Advantage West Midlands as a tool to attract more funding to the town and significant long-term improvements can be made under the banner of Stourport Forward.
- 5.4 The Chairman is pleased to advise the Panel that a worthwhile Scrutiny exercise has been undertaken by the Task and Finish Group, with clear focus on the terms of reference agreed at the commencement of the review, and that several achievable draft recommendations have been identified by the Group.

## **6. Recommended to the Cabinet:**

- (a) **Relevant Council officers, including the Economic Regeneration Officer, Principal Forward Planning Officer, Tourism Officer, and the Environmental/Parks Manager, continue to support and promote the implementation of “Stourport Pride” project;**
- (b) **Relevant Council officers, including the Economic Regeneration Officer continue to support and promote the implementation of the revitalisation of the Sandy Lane Industrial Estate project, the Stourport Canal Basin project and the Farmers Market;**
- (c) **Relevant Council officers continue to support and monitor progress all other projects as required and relevant;**
- (d) **The Council continues to fund Stourport Forward’s Programme Manager through its contribution towards Stourport Town Centre Forum for 2006/07.**

- (e) The Environment and Economic Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Panel receive regular progress reports on the project from the Programme Manager and the appointed Council representative; and
- (f) A full report on the scrutiny exercise be published on the Council's website.