Park Lane Open Space, Kidderminster

1. Summary

1.1 This briefing paper outlines the main elements of a public realm framework for Park Lane, Kidderminster prepared by Taylor Young.

2. Background

2.1 During 2005/06 the Head of Planning, Health and Environment in consultation with the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services invited landscape consultants to look at the potential use of an area of open space adjacent to Park Lane in Kidderminster. The commissioning of Taylor Young was reported through the Information Bulletin in December 2005.

2.2 The Park Lane site provides a natural setting to the town centre and Weavers Wharf development. The land is designated as ‘urban open space’ in the Local Plan and is part owned by the District Council having previously been earmarked for Phase 5 of the town centre ring road; a proposal that was shelved during the late 1990’s.

2.3 As part of preparations for the Local Development Framework a district-wide green space audit is due to be undertaken during 2007. On the face of it the Park Lane site offers a unique opportunity to create some useable green space in the heart of the Kidderminster town centre (an area generally devoid of green space) and lies immediately adjacent to proposed new housing areas earmarked for the existing timber yard and derelict ‘Rock Works’ factory. The ultimate goal may involve linking this new neighbourhood to Weavers Wharf via a footbridge over the canal and creating a new ‘town park’ and street improvements.

3. Park Lane, Kidderminster

3.1 Park Lane is of mixed industrial/ commercial and residential character. The lane is also characterised by open space(s) and proximity to the town centre. During 2005 there was known interest emerging into the possible residential redevelopment of sites in the canal corridor including the former Zanzibar nightclub and the timber yard (both earmarked for housing).
3.2 As part of negotiations for the ‘Piano Building’ at Weavers Wharf the District Council secured the developers agreements for a new pedestrian bridge link to land on the Weavers Wharf site from Park Lane. The ‘urban open space’ beyond Park Lane is an area of self seeded woodland and scrub. As regenerated greenfield land this area was protected for its open space value as part of the 2004 Local Plan.

3.3 The study has helped Development Control negotiations to secure significant developer contributions as part of the proposed redevelopment of Zanzibars in Castle Road and the Parkers Arms in Park Lane towards improved open space in the area. Whilst interest in other sites has ‘cooled’ for the moment the ‘public realm framework’ provides a basis for future negotiations. Significantly, the document will also help to provide some technical background to the emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Central Area Action Plan. It is envisaged the park lane open space may form part of a wider ‘greening the centre’ or ‘nature to heart’ approach that makes more of the town’s relationship with the River Stour. The redevelopment of the timber yard will also help complete the regeneration impact of Weavers Wharf.

3.4 In addition to the baseline assessment the study focuses on the following:

- Greenspace: a new town park evolving as a new residential neighbourhood develops;
- Creating the east/ west link to connect regeneration of Park Lane to Weavers Wharf and;
- Potential environmental enhancement works to Park Lane.
- Next steps… towards creating an attractive neighbourhood of strong visual character and amenity that has clear links to the town centre.

4. Greenspace

4.1 The largest part of the woodland site is in the ownership of the District Council. Other parts of the site are owned by the County Council with a small area in the ownership of the adjacent Timber Yard.

4.2 The framework prepared by Taylor Young includes a public realm and open space audit flagging up some complex issues for the area and in particular the open space. The most obvious being the steeply sloping bank which contributes greatly to the impact of the woodland on the setting of the town centre. The wooded escarpments both here and on the opposite (eastern) side of the town centre adjacent to the ring road help to define the natural bowl of Kidderminster and the association with the Canal and River Stour. The site also affords views over the wider town centre.
4.3 The severe gradient of the slope raises technical difficulties in opening up the open space to public access and relies on a number of retaining structures within the site including the retaining wall running the length of the Park Lane. Generally, the study found these structures to be in a poor state of repair. There is also extensive fly tipping in evidence at the top of the bank originating from the housing area fronting Park Street.

4.4 It is clear from the presence of informal pathways and evidence of informal recreation within the site that the public have used the space in the past. Despite this, there are significant health and safety concerns and liabilities associated with the land remaining open to public access in its current state. As a consequence the District Council made the site secure early in 2006. There is also evidence of nature conservation interest in the site.

4.5 The public realm framework identifies a phasing option towards the evolution of a ‘neighbourhood park’. The options range from security and safety improvements starting at £35,000 and all options include improving the boundary treatment and removal of fly-tipping. The study estimates that the total cost of a new neighbourhood park could be £400,000. Further investigatory surveys are required, but ultimately it is envisaged that any significant scheme would need to be funded through developer contributions and/or separate grant funding. Before getting too far with any planning process it will be important to gain a clearer understanding of the site constraints including the following technical studies:

- Topographic survey
- Structural surveys
- Contamination study
- Tree survey
- Phase 1 Habitat survey
- Bat survey.

4.6 Options for the open space range from focussing on more naturalistic influences and woodland management to the creation of a formal town park. Other opportunities might include making use of the topography of the site as the setting for public art.

4.7 The recent erection of palisade fencing was an expedient response to the recognised liability while discussions continue about the future of the area. It is envisaged that a first phase project could involve improving the fencing by painting and planting. Other initial improvements might include the removal of extensive fly-tipping. This would necessarily involve consultation and dialogue with nearby residents to deter further fly tipping and establish local opinion on the future of the open space. It is considered that improvements to the Park Lane aspect will enhance Park Lane and create a more conducive residential setting for the wider area.
5. **New Bridge Link**

5.1 As part of negotiations with the owners of Weavers Wharf, a landing stage for a new bridge linking the site to Park Lane was agreed and is subject of a legal agreement. The idea is to extend the visual axis between Slingfield Mill and the Piano Building across the canal to a focal point that could be created in the ‘greenspace’ and timber yard areas. A new bridge will cross the canal springing from Canal Square (defined by Slingfield Mill and Frankie & Benny’s) into an open space in the Timber Yard housing site and will complete Canal Square as a space which spans the canal.

6. **Street Works to Park Lane**

6.1 In order to guide the form of development involving the timber yard and Rock Works site the consultants were asked to consider the wider public realm of Park Lane and specifically the design of the vehicular and pedestrian environment. The resulting framework demonstrates how shared surface ‘squares’ and on street car parking could be sensitively incorporated into any redevelopment schemes. These include specific proposals for the northern entrance to Park Lane around the Rock Works to create a softer gateway into the area. The framework includes an indicative materials palette. It is proposed that these shall form the basis of pre-application discussions with prospective developers.

8. **Consultation**

- This report has been prepared jointly with the Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services

9. **Options for The Panel**

9.1 That the ‘Park Lane, Kidderminster: Public Realm Framework’ be endorsed as the basis for further discussions and consideration in the preparation of the Local Development Framework;

9.2 As above with a recommendation to Cabinet that the Head of Cultural Leisure and Commercial Services in consultation with the Head of Planning, Health and Environment give further consideration to an initial stage of improvements that includes enhancing the boundary treatments as set out in this report to include the removal of fly tipping and consultation with residents and businesses in the area.

9.3 Any other options considered by the Panel.

10. **Financial Implications**

The costs of undertaking the phase one improvements & investigations are expected to be met from developer contributions and/or future budgets.
11. Appendices


12. Background Papers

- Wyre Forest District Local Plan

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