



Business & Retail Networking Forum Minutes
Tuesday 21 July 2009 2:00-3:30pm
Britannia Hotel

Chairman – Shirley Kent – Head of Commercial Development, CV One and member of the BID Sub-Committee.

1. Welcome by Matthew Stuart, General Manager, Britannia Hotel.

Matthew welcomed BID members to the hotel and inviting attendees to a tour after the meeting to view the recently refurbished rooms.

2. Introduction – Shirley Kent, Head of Commercial Development, CV One

Shirley would Chair the meeting as Andy Talbot Chair had sent his apologies. Shirley thanked Matthew and the Britannia Hotel for hosting the forum and welcomed all attendees; she also welcomed four Coventry Magistrates and a representative from the West Midlands Police Authority (WMPA) whose purpose for attending was the opportunity to meet with businesses and business organisations and to listen to their experiences and discuss relevant issues. David Lawrance- Hallgarth from Coventry Magistrates thanked Shirley for the invite on behalf of his colleagues and welcomed any questions attendees might have for him after the meeting on the judicial process. Claire Dobrovic from the WMPA also thanked the forum for inviting them and asked for the opportunity for WMPA Member Brendan Connor to talk briefly at the next meeting on the role of the Authority. She was also pleased to see that the Police have a regular item on the agenda. Shirley then ran through the agenda and said that because the Christmas plans had yet to be finalised the planned agenda item 'Marketing and Tourism update' would now be included at the next forum in November.

3. City Centre Development-update by Paul Beesley, Team leader – Property Development, City Development Directorate.

Paul gave an update on the Ironmonger Square development, and introduced his colleague Peter Ullah from Coventry City Council Highways Department to answer any technical questions at the end. Paul reminded the meeting that approval for the scheme had been given in 2007, but work had been delayed after a routine inspection revealed concerns that the road in Ironmonger Row could collapse if structural repairs to the Primark service tunnel were not instigated. A solution had now been found and work had commenced. However costs of £400,000, considerably less than the earlier estimate of

£1.5 million, would still have an impact on money reserved for the whole project. Paul identified the traffic route flows, with buses and taxis accessing the Burges from both Trinity Street and Broadgate. The rest of the area at the top of the Burges and Ironmonger Row would be pedestrianised and include natural sandstone paving, trees, improved lighting and seating areas. The square would not be stepped as initially planned, but instead include a walkway incline. The paved areas leading towards the far end of the Burges would be re-laid and any black-top removed. It was hoped that at a later date, if further funding could be secured, the widening of the pavement in this area of the Burges would be approved. Paul said there would no doubt be initial concerns and issues with access to both the street and service areas, but that by working with the businesses in the area they would be resolved. He mentioned that at a later date the Highways Department would be reviewing all traffic flows in that area including Broadgate and High Street. The Ironmonger Square scheme would go before the City Councils Cabinet on Tuesday 28 July but it was expected that work on the Square would commence in late summer and be completed early next year.

Paul then went on to give an update on other developments in the City Centre. The area on the corner of Bishop Street/Wells Street had now been demolished and hoardings erected, and they were actively looking for an office scheme for that site. Severn Trent's new offices in Little Park Street were on schedule and work had recently started on the Manor Road footbridge, which would improve access from the City Centre to the railway station. Fitting out of the new offices of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) at Earlsdon Park would commence shortly, with doors opening in early 2010. On completion of both projects over 2,000 jobs would have been created for the City.

Ground works had started on 'Coventry University Phase 1a' a £160 million, 5 year investment scheme which would bring new cutting-edge institutes to the campus and the City Centre. Infrastructure work had also started on the Friargate scheme at Coventry Station and a planning application would be submitted in August. A report to agree the next stage for the Jerde City Centre master plan would go before the Cabinet in September, but following the recent announcement that Coventry Market has been given a Grade II listing by English Heritage, its integration into the masterplan would be challenging but could also offer new opportunities.

Paul then responded to questions from the floor.

He confirmed that Trinity Street would be one-way, with buses either continuing into Broadgate or turning right into the Burges. The question of access was raised, but he assured businesses that access to service areas in Palmer Lane would continue. Of course there was the possibility that service vehicles might have to access the Burges, but this could be resolved with designated times. The entrance between the new Square and West Orchards would be pedestrianised, with bollards allowing only emergency vehicles entry. There would be a new bus stop at the side of Primark (opposite Holy Trinity) and possibly two in the Burges; these would be for drop off and pick up only. There would be restrictions on cars entering the area similar to the Whittle Arches scheme; however it was pointed out that this system was continually abused. Paul responded by saying that

signage would help to clarify who could use the route and when and also assist with the enforcement of the restrictions. It was hoped that to support the evening economy night time parking, similar to the Fairfax Street operation, would be introduced. There were concerns and disappointment from the traders in the Burges that the priority spend was for Ironmonger Row and Cross Cheaping and that large vacant units still blighted the middle/lower Burges. Paul hoped that these improvements in the area and a turnaround of economic confidence in the UK would address these concerns. Shirley Kent asked Paul if there would be ongoing communication and access for all traders while work was in progress, Paul confirmed there would be a Liaison Officer present to resolve any issues.

Shirley Kent, at the end of the presentation, congratulated Paul and his colleagues at the Investment and Business team at the City Council for being crowned Midlands City of the Year at the recent West Midlands Property Awards, beating off competition from a large number of cities including Birmingham, Nottingham and Leicester,.

4. City Centre Police issues – Sergeant Nigel Pagdin.

Nigel presented the City Centre neighbourhood crime figures for the period April -June 2009 which once again saw the overall crime figures reduced, for the 23rd month in a row. In total there were 758 crimes within the City Centre neighbourhood, compared to 999 in the corresponding period in 2008, a reduction of 24.2%. Vehicle crime had reduced by 57.7% from 71 incidents to 30. Violent crime reduced by 9.6% from 178 incidents to 161, and shop theft by 6.2% from 177 to 166 incidents. Personal robberies remained low, with 11 offences during both periods. He said that all members of the Police family have worked consistently to achieve and maintain a low level of crime in Coventry City Centre using various initiatives. Through constant liaison with partner agencies, businesses, residents and visitors they had been able to prevent adverse crime trends emerging. Vehicle crime was now exceptionally low due to effective offender management and patrol strategies; also purse dipping had decreased due to targeted patrols and plain clothes operations.

Nigel said they were aware of issues surrounding rough sleepers and beggars and were currently considering the most effective methods to tackle the issue to provide a long term resolution. Recently a prolific aggressive beggar had received a CRASBO banning him from the City Centre for 3 years and a prolific anti-social drunk and beggar a custodial sentence of 5 months. There were also continued efforts being made at various locations within the City Centre to keep incidents of anti-social behaviour low throughout the summer holidays. Nigel gave an example of a recent successful operation at Pool Meadow on the last day of term when over 1,000 young people were screened for knives with detectors, not one knife was found. Nigel also warned businesses that fake £20 notes of a very high standard were circulating in the City.

The public website for West Midlands Police had now been updated in line with their neighbourhood policing pledge with a dedicated email address:

m1_nhp_citycentre@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk and this email address was monitored on a daily basis with a response or visit within 24 hours. Officers could also be contacted via telephone 0845 1135000 Ext 7931 6006, any voicemails left are monitored regularly. The Police now hold a monthly Neighbourhood Engagement meeting which takes place on the first Tuesday of every month; further details were on the website.

Nigel then introduced his colleagues Clare Marston and Phil Hollingsworth from West Midlands Police. Both work very closely with the licensed premises in the City Centre, Licensing officer Norman Cox, and Coventry City Council's Licensing and Regulatory Committee. The purpose of today's talk was to highlight a case recently involving Trinity's in Trinity Street, who had lost their license for two months. Clare explained the process that could eventually lead to premises losing their license, and said the system was based on the traffic light sequence with amber indicating that a number of incidents had taken place and been recorded either through CCTV, or logged, including spot checks for under age drinking. A meeting was held with the Licensee and they had the opportunity to discuss the incidents at a hearing at the Council House where a mandatory action plan had been agreed. The premises were monitored and if there were further problems their License could be revoked. Clare said that generally the vast majority of licensed premises in the City Centre were very good in what were very difficult trading conditions. The team also worked with businesses on two other projects 'Drug safe' and 'Weapon safe' whereby visitors were searched for both drugs and weapons on the door. If people were in possession of a small amount of drugs they were confiscated and stored for collection from the Police. If however it was a large amount, or a weapon was found on their person the Police were called. They team also work alongside other partnerships addressing the issue of alcohol and young people.

There were no questions from the floor

5. Retail Crime Operation – Marc Dwyer BID Liaison Executive

Marc introduced himself and said that his presentation today would cover the period in his role, which was now approaching 12 months. He would talk about his main responsibilities, the background of the Retail Crime Operation (RCO), what had been achieved in the first year, and his further objectives for the next 12 months.

Marc talked about his main responsibilities which were to oversee the day to day running of the RCO, liaise with all BID members to reduce retail crime within the city centre, and act as a first point of contact for any general queries or problems. He also on a day to day basis issued and maintained equipment purchased through the BID, such as the retail link radios and trained BID members in the operation of the Retail Link radio system. There were over 300 radios issued to the retailers and 40 radios issued to the Police covering 180 businesses in the City Centre, the vast majority being retailers or businesses in the leisure sector. There were other partner and agencies such as Central Six Retail Park, Centro, Coventry Sports Centre, Probation Service, Job Centre, British Transport Police, West Midlands Police, Coventry University and the Youth Offending Service.

Marc then explained how his role in representing the BID membership had improved dialogue with the Police and partner agencies and all businesses now have a specialist contact within CV One. He had also introduced 'Active Crime Intelligence System' (ACIS) a database which holds intelligence on known shoplifters and is linked regionally to share that information, also suitable for reporting minor offences, attempted offences and recorded statistical analysis of stock loss. The introduction of an Exclusion Scheme in February 2009 had now seen 55 prolific shoplifters excluded from the City Centre for a 12 month period. Window stickers for retailers wanting to promote the scheme telling shoplifters that they are a member can be obtained by contacting the Control room at CV One on the radio link or phoning Marc on 0750 0821492. Digital cameras funded by the BID and given to key security staff for offender images was another new initiative.

Bi-monthly intelligence meetings were introduced last year and were attended by store and shopping centre security staff, the Police and CV One security staff. More recently weekly intelligence meetings for central security staff were introduced and are held in the Police Box allowing a more rapid response to intelligence information. Aside from the obvious benefits the meetings had increased awareness of the BID amongst front line retail security staff.

Marc said that his role had meant more opportunities to deliver on-site training sessions with one or more members of staff on the radio system, including best practise in dealing with shoplifters, and to pass on regular intelligence from the Police. There had also been an improved response time to radio or battery faults.

In looking ahead Marc was keen to promote awareness of the Exclusion Scheme through a poster and media campaign and also introduce Acceptable Behaviour Contracts for those shoplifters not so prolific. He was also keen to develop a secure website for all RCO members and to visit schools and talk about shoplifting and the consequences if caught.

Marc then invited businesses to two FREE security training exercises later this year; the first Project Argus, on Tuesday 8 December 2009 was a National Counter-Terrorism initiative which explores ways to aid the prevention, handling and recovery from a terrorist attack and is aimed at business managers and owners. The second is Project Griffin, dedicated to reducing the risk and impact of a terrorist attack by engaging with the local business community. Arranged by the City Council and West Midlands Police, Project Griffin on Tuesday 3 November 2009 was designed to raise awareness and included a briefing on the latest national threat assessment. It would assist delegates to respond better to their organisation's security challenges in the event of a major incident. The course was aimed at security officers, door staff, and workers who have a security responsibility for staff, colleagues and the public. **Registration for both courses is 9.30am with a 10am start, finishing at 3.30pm in the HMS Diamond Rooms, Coventry Council House. To reserve your place Phone: 024 76832066 or e-mail emergency.planning@coventry.gov.uk**

6. Business Improvement District (BID) update by Shirley Kent – CVOne.

Shirley reflected on the previous two presentations relating to activity to reduce crime in the City Centre and was able to report that shop theft in the City Centre in the Jan-June period was 12.6% down compared to the corresponding period the previous year. Our cleansing score for the same period was 11.9% which had improved by 1%. These figures were set against a Government benchmark of below 18%. Footfall for the six months year on year was -0.9% compared to the national average of -2.2% but Shirley was still conscious that a lot of businesses especially the independents were struggling. This concern had prompted CV One, the Local Authority and Enterprising Coventry (formerly LEGI) to organise a One stop Advisory Service for Independent traders at a City Centre store for 2 sessions this week, an opportunity for businesses to speak confidentially on areas where support could be offered. If you missed these sessions call Dave Mooney on 02476 607051 who can arrange a personal visit. Details on interest free loans from the Carbon Trust to fund energy saving equipment were also drawn to the attention of BID members. The contact number is 0800 085 2005.

7. Any other business.

New openings since the last BID Bulletin included two leisure businesses in Priory Place, No3 Bar and China Express which meant that this area was now fully occupied. T-box had opened in the City Arcade and Xplicit and West Coast, both fashion stores had opened in West Orchards.

Vacant units, like most towns and cities in the UK, were a concern and Shirley talked briefly on two projects which in some way will address the empty shops issue. The first, in partnership with Mercia FM and the Local Authority, was a competition for a new business to win a unit in the City Centre FREE for a year. The second, with agreement from the appropriate landlords, was the opportunity for CV One to window dress and spruce up empty shops. Shirley talked briefly about a recent report from the British Retail Consortium, now receiving media attention, on the crisis facing the UK high street. At first glance a lot of the recommendations Coventry was already tackling, but possibly a more in-depth read might reveal something new. Shirley also reminded businesses to enter the Godiva Awards and that entry forms and details were on their seat.

There was also an opportunity, previously highlighted in the BID Bulletin, for businesses to take advantage of a promotion specifically targeting employees at the new QCA and Severn Trent headquarters. This needed to be a promotional offer strong enough to get people away from their desk and into your shop, bar or restaurant. For further details on this promotion please contact Dave Mooney on 02476 607051.

8. Date of Next Meeting.

Tuesday 3 November 2009 venue to be confirmed.

