



**Business & Retail Networking Forum Minutes
Tuesday 28 April 2009 2:00-3:30pm
Coventry Telegraph Offices**

Chairman – Andy Talbot – Centre Manager, West Orchards and Chair of the BID Sub-Committee.

1. Welcome by Dave Brookes, Editor, Coventry Telegraph.

Dave welcomed the City Centre Business Improvement District (BID) members and talked briefly about his career and aspirations for the newspaper. Dave had been in journalism for 30 years and before moving to Coventry was Editor of the Sunday Mercury for 8 years. There had been a recent major restructure of the newspaper group, with investment in the central newsroom and electronic communication. Like many other businesses, costs had been reduced so that the Company would be in a strong position when the recession ended. He believed that print and online news complemented each other, and recently 3 community news websites had been launched with further sites planned in the future. Dave believed strongly that the Telegraph is the voice of Coventry and Warwickshire, and remains at the heart of the City and its readership.

Andy Talbot thanked Dave and the Coventry Telegraph for the use of its offices, and asked if his editorial policy would change in that front page stories would highlight more positive news, as opposed to the previous regime of negativity. Dave responded that, as the voice of their readers, it was important to have the right balance of both good and bad headlines, but agreed that if there is good news we should shout about it.

2. Introduction – Andy Talbot, BID Chairman.

Andy went through the agenda and welcomed Bob Townsend a Coventry Magistrate whose aim and that of his colleagues was to liaise more with the business community by attending meetings like this, giving them a better understanding of issues affecting businesses. He welcomed any questions attendees might have for him after the meeting.

3. Support for Independent Businesses – Helena Bassett – Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce – Enterprising Coventry (formerly LEGI).

There were predictions that this worldwide recession would be severe and prolonged for the UK was the message from Helena Bassett at **Enterprising Coventry**. Even

when the recovery did come growth is likely to be slow. Businesses faced many challenges, lack of disposable income, issues with access to finance, and the increased burden of fixed and variable costs to mention but a few. But there was help locally. **Enterprising Coventry** can help, advise and even find funding so that businesses will not only survive, but grow.

Local advisors at **Enterprising Coventry** can help businesses:

- Identify and eliminate unnecessary costs to the business
- Advise on low cost/no cost branding and marketing strategies
- Identify new markets by diversifying
- Maximise websites
- Help with finance and grants
- Provide the opportunity to discuss ideas and concerns in confidence

And help with unravelling:

- Government schemes to help Independent business
- Potential grants available
- Seminars
- Networking events
- Funded training
- Procurement
- Other sources of support

Helena said the most important message to independent businesses whether established or new, in the City Centre was that there was help with funding and advice, and that you were not on your own. For further information call **Enterprising Coventry on 08000 30 53 44**

Shirley Kent added at the end of the presentation that the success of the recent Business Vitality Programme (BVP) was partly due to free help and support from Business Link and the Chamber of Commerce, and recommended Helena and her team as an excellent 'One Stop Shop' Andy Talbot said that as a landlord of a large shopping centre he was aware that national brands were quiet in respect of vacant unit occupancy. However local new start- up businesses were taking advantage of competitive rental rates.

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

Paul's presentation focused on what was happening over the next 12-24 months.

Sustainable developments included the new Severn Trent Headquarters, the Qualification & Curriculum's Authority (QCA) new offices at Earlsdon Park (formerly the City College site) and phase 2a the Belgrade Plaza scheme which included the Premier Inn whose doors were opening in May and the Metro Bar & Grill, Bella Italia and Pizza

Express opening in the summer. Planning consent for Phase 3, student housing, had been approved. With reference to the Radisson Edwardian Hotel and the funding of this development, Paul said this was awaiting confirmation and that the Regional Development Agency, Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and other partnerships were working hard to find a solution.

The demolition of buildings on the corner of Bishop Street/Wells Street had now started with a proposed 73,000 sq ft office scheme to commence once a pre-let had been secured. Work had already started on phase 1 at Coventry University, the first stage of a £160 million investment over the next 5 years. An outline planning application is expected shortly for the Friargate development at Coventry Station; however there was no news on the proposed development at the Millennium View site in Hales Street.

The team at City Development Directorate had been tasked by the new Chief Executive Officer of Coventry City Council, Martin Reeves, to turn the City Centre masterplan into reality so that when the recession ends Coventry's delivery plan is ready and top of the list for investment and change. Outside the immediate City Centre, Ericsson's new Headquarters at Ansty Park would be opening in the summer.

Paul invited attendees to bring to the next forum suggestions on how to keep the City Centre functional and strong during this economic downturn and asked for this item to be included on the agenda.

Andy Talbot asked Paul for an update on the Ironmonger Square development as there were concerns that future delays could start to impact on next Christmas, adding the last 18 months had been a disaster for a lot of businesses in this area and that a number of them would be appealing against their business rates. Andy urged BID members to voice their concerns about the delayed Ironmonger Square Development and to write to Martin Reeves the Chief Executive Officer, Coventry City Council. Paul responded that the Primark service tunnel underneath Ironmonger Row would be completed by October. Andy asked members to e-mail him at Andy@WestOrchards.co.uk with ideas to tidy up the area, for example Christmas marketing on the Herras fencing, as it seemed very unlikely that the above ground environment would change in the foreseeable future.

5. City Centre Police issues – Sergeant Nigel Pagdin.

Nigel talked through the City Centre's Neighbourhood Policing Team's crime report, with a copy given to each attendee.

The document was a specific breakdown of total recorded crime for the last year, and even though down on the previous year, there had been an increase in serious acquisitive crime blamed on the deepening recession. Nigel praised Magistrates who recently had imposed stronger custodial sentences for prolific shoplifters; this not only kept them off the streets, but it also gave out a warning that shoplifting in Coventry City Centre will not be tolerated. But he warned that as long as the economic downturn continues, people will be tempted to steal, and that is why an extra 4 officers will be introduced into the City

Centre for 6 months. The store manager at Debenhams had seen in the last financial year a reduction in stock loss and praised the partnership between the Police, Store Security Staff and the BID Liaison Executive Marc Dwyer who had taken forward a number of effective retail crime initiatives including exclusion orders.

Anti Social Behaviour had seen a significant decrease with the Police making a concerted effort to listen to the public and businesses in the City Centre, targeting specific areas where groups were causing problems. It was an ongoing issue, and the possibility of a recreation area for young people using land behind the Sports Centre was being explored. Peter Walters commented that, following a meeting with a business that day, concerns were voiced about drinking and begging in the Herbert Gallery and Museum area, and that a serious incident might be waiting to happen. Nigel said that recently introduced was a patrol visit strategy to other parts of the City Centre, and that this particular area would be included.

Nigel added that following a recent count, the number of vagrant sleepers in the City Centre was only 4. However he was well aware that areas which at the time were hazardous and dangerous to access did house others. The particular area on the corner of Well Street and Bishop Street was now being demolished, but with the warm weather approaching the trend for a lot of the sleepers was to move into the parks. Tracy Harker, Centre Manager for Cathedral Lanes, asked for assistance in that a regular visitor each morning was using their toilets inappropriately, and displaying anti social behaviour. Nigel would talk to Tracy after the meeting to try and resolve the issue.

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

Shirley urged all BID members to complete and return the form recently sent to all businesses seeking information on the stock loss and performance figures for the last year. She clarified that all information would be confidential, but it was important that a comprehensive report on the City Centre performance over the last financial year was undertaken by the Business Strategy Team at CVOne. **(A further copy is attached to these minutes)**

Footfall in the City Centre, even though down year on year at -2%, was still better than the national average at -4% , vacant units had now reached 67 (15%) which was the highest for many years. However, there had been 15 openings since January a mixture of businesses, and the next few months would see the Leisure offer strengthen with the opening of the Travelodge and Premier Inn hotels, and a number of restaurants and bars in the City Centre.

The City Centre was now a lot stronger in terms of its cultural offer, and the existing Dr Who exhibition at the Coventry Transport Museum and the forthcoming China Exhibition at the Herbert will attract visitors from a wide area. It was crucial that new visitors left our City feeling positive and that issues like graffiti and other anti-social behaviour must be tackled immediately. A recent front page report in the Coventry

Telegraph highlighted the importance of taking a firm line with offenders who had been arrested and told to pay the costs of the damage incurred.

7. Any other business.

The manager at Shoezone in Hertford Street was concerned that recent re-grouting and cleansing of the pavement area had dirtied shop fronts, Dave Mooney was asked to speak to the Operations team at CVOne and report back directly to the Manager.

The manager of Debenham's asked Paul Beesley about the future of the Barracks car park and commented that ongoing maintenance costs would be better spent on a major refurbishment. Paul responded by saying that a strategic decision had been made not to spend a lot of money on it, because of the proposed City Centre masterplan, and that they would continue to make it safe and functional. The question was asked if Sunday car parking charges could be waived giving the City Centre at least a level playing field when competing with local retail parks. Andy Talbot responded that during consultation, and prior to the Council Cabinet agreeing new car park tariffs, he had written a letter on behalf of the BID to make Sundays free. This request had been turned down.

A representative from Coventry Building Society said that increased charges targeted at long stay parkers had an impact not only on their staff, but a lot of professional and retail employees, and believed this would only have a negative affect on investment and encouraging staff to work in the City Centre. Paul Beesley responded by saying that car parks are an income stream and that the Council had worked hard to make sure that the charges represent a balance between the interests of car park users and Council tax payers. The decision had also been made not to increase charges from 0 to 4 hours so as to encourage shoppers and visitors.

Tracy Harker, Cathedral Lanes Shopping Centre Manager asked if there was an update on Taxi congestion in the City Centre following questions from the floor at the last Forum. Sergeant Nigel Pagdin reported that Inspector Brian Hornsby had held a meeting with the Taxi Association and the Taxi Licensing Department. The conclusion being that the ratio of Taxi licenses to Taxi ranking is unbalanced and that despite the best efforts of driver's, problems will occur.

6. Date of Next Meeting.

Tuesday 21 July 2009 2pm-3.30pm at the Britannia Hotel, Fairfax Street, Coventry

