

Westside Traders Group Meeting Minutes
7.Apr.22 Equinox

Name	Representing	Name	Representing
Alex Abdelaal	Chair Westside Traders Gp (WSTG)	Stephen Simkins (SS)	Councillor Deputy Leader
Des Duggal	Representation Westside Traders Gp	Lynne Moran	Councillor St Peters Ward
Cherry Shine (CS)	Wolverhampton BID	John Roseblade (JR)	Dir. of Housing & Environ.
Shaun Boyce	Wolverhampton BID	Isobel Wood (IW)	Head of Enterprise
Richard Scharenguivel	Mander Centre	Ruth Taylor (RT)	Public Realms
		Stuart Anderson	MP Wton Southwest
		Paul Singh	Councillor Penn Ward
		Sohail Khan	Councillor Tettenhall Regis
		Keith Inston	Councillor East Park
		Philip Page	Councillor Bilston North
Apologies			
			Actions
Welcome and introductions			
	Cherry welcomed everyone to the meeting & asked Top Table to introduce themselves.		
Items for discussion WTG - Concerns			
1	Business Trade Drastic reduction of footfall 65%-70% since commencement of phase 1 public realm work since November 2021. Consequential effects on livelihoods: Cherry Read the 1 st point of the agenda covering 1.1-1.9.		
1.1	Inability to pay overheads inclusive of wages, rents etc.		
1.2	In-operable conditions for businesses to function in normal daily activities. i.e., collections of heavy items, deliveries of goods to name but a few, serving disability customers.		
1.3	Business sustainability severely impacted at a time when businesses were still recovering post covid.		
1.4	The psychological impact of people's shopping habits has changed since covid and any form of recovery or return to normality has been severely impacted by the works underway i.e. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People just started to return to shopping post covid are now finding it extremely difficult to get into the city. • Forcing people to turn to shopping elsewhere & online • Confidence in High St shopping has declined due to inconveniences caused as a result of 'prohibited' access to businesses • Signage to parking very confusing as people finding difficulty in manoeuvring • No guarantee of return of customers 		
1.5	Removal of bus stops.		
1.6	Impact of continued city centre development, noise pollution, dust, smells etc on people's shopping experience.		
1.7	What are the USP's of Wolverhampton which boasted so many independent businesses. So many long-standing businesses have gone and may go as a result.		
1.8	Whilst landlords have filled some empty shops on the promise of Wolverhampton being investable. How will new businesses be sustained if existing businesses have been struggling as a result of disruptive developmental changes since Summer Row and now limited footfall.		

1.9	Survivability of Westside may deteriorate to a level where it will not recover. As businesses are unable to meet rents and overheads as customers are no longer able to access shops.	
	<p><u>Councillor Simkins</u> Made opening statement requesting he wants to understand what the issues were from the Westside Traders. He was open to listening to the concerns and actioned John Rosedale to set up a team to deal with the areas of concern presented here in whole of Section 1 and other sections. A single point of contact/email was also to be set up.</p> <p><u>Discussions & Council Commitments:</u> Whilst we would still need a formal response to the points raised in the agenda, it is hoped that once a team is set up clarity will be given to points raised some of which were touched upon during the discussion of point 1.</p> <p><u>Listed below are the actions that were to be tackled immediately by the council.</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crisis Management, acceptance of the need for compensation/hardship. Council stated like with Covid all businesses will need to provide evidence of losses sustained thus far and moving forwards. Simkins to raise at higher level HARSHIP and how to mitigate the losses that businesses have experiencing since the commencement of the works. There has been no consultation with Westside businesses since 2018 and Councillor Simpkins guaranteed that Westside traders will play an active role in creating a policy and strategy to move forward in a cohesive manner. Need consideration for a 3-4 support package during this transitory time. 2. Council accepted that lesson had to be learnt in not fully realising the direct impact of the road works and road closures on businesses. Direct email/single point of contact to capture Westside issues. 3. Identify how the council can support businesses immediately, short/medium term and long term whilst developments go on. Through :- - Business support - Marketing support – closer look at advertising - Chamber of Commerce 4. Work with Westside businesses to develop a policy and strategy to ensure sustainability and connectivity to other areas of the City e.g. i9 Isabelle explained the reasoning for the development work, which is accepted that it will be eventually beneficial for the linkages to the difference areas, however, <u>how do the council intend to drive footfall back to this side of the town. Need a clear strategy of how this will be done with clear timescales and accountability. This is extremely urgent.</u> 5. Provide “vision” of how the plans will eventually look post development. 6. Clear visibility that communication breakdown has caused utmost confusion for businesses:- - Signage - Barriers - Disability Parking - Deliveries - Failure to ensure information has been disseminated to WSTG businesses. - Timescales for works - clear - Liasion needs to be improved with Meghan/Council/Businesses 	<p>JR</p> <p>SS</p> <p>JR/IW</p> <p>SS/JR/IW</p> <p>IW/JR</p> <p>SS</p> <p>JR/RT</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Posters/Information on developments - that can be given to customers - Focus is on what Roads are closed and not on Businesses are still open - Parking during changes <p>7. Need for a proactive council which works closely with BID & Independent businesses – particularly Westside.</p>	SS/JR/BID
2	Parking	
2.1	<p>Current parking has been an ongoing concern. People getting confused on how to access car parks such as Bell St. causing disruption in Skinner St. i.e., cars turning around after realising road closures.</p> <p>WSTG – Closures of road access to Bell Street/Mander car park and re-routing of traffic has been very confusing. The loss of Beatties Car park has impacted the footfall as it has made it more inconvenient for customers to park.</p> <p>This section is to be addressed as part of the strategy for returning footfall to Westside</p>	JR/IW
2.2	<p>Lack of cash machines, some of our more mature customers prefer to put coins in the machine rather than download an app or go through the pay by phone system.</p> <p>School St. car park has no facility to pay by cash. A visitor would not know this’ until they had parked and gone to the machines to pay.</p> <p>WSTG – Wayne raised this as an issue for elderly and other customers.</p>	
2.3	<p>People call regularly and ask; ‘are we open, where can we park and how can we get there’?</p>	
2.4	<p>Free Parking? Is that on the council plans?</p> <p>Is the Odeon pulling out of the Westside development because the Council would not grant them a free car park</p> <p>Councillor Simkins Stated that Cinema - Odean cannot be discussed due to the sensitivity of the financial implications.</p>	
4	Security	
4.1	<p>CCTV around lower end Victoria St./School St/Salop St.</p> <p>What if any, improvements/additions to CCTV for the area around Westside. Consistent breakages of shop windows etc. causing business disruption, inconvenience and not visibly giving good impressions to the few customers that are still coming to Wolverhampton.</p> <p>Evening economy, classes. Concerns of customers, clients and students’ safety.</p> <p>WSTG (Ravi Duggal & others) mentioned that drugs, graffiti etc were an issue</p>	

	<p>which made customers, particularly elderly feel unsafe. This issue has been ongoing for a while.</p> <p><u>Councillor Simkins</u> Agreed that there was a clear problem with Policing the area.</p> <p><u>Cherry</u> suggested that any issues arising around homelessness should be forwarded to them .</p>	<p>SS</p> <p>WSTG</p>
4.2	<p>Shop Lifting.</p> <p><u>Cherry(BID)</u> As part of the BID stated that BID levy payers have access to an app which allows businesses to share and beware of individuals. Cherry to consider if the app can be distributed to Westside</p>	<p>CS</p>
4.3	<p>Business retention, flagship attractions down Westside and not just Dudley St etc. How do you propose to advertise independent business which Wolverhampton are known for.</p> <p>No business visibility as to what is available this side of the city.</p> <p><u>WSTG (Esme & others)</u> Promotion seems to be key on what roads etc are closed and not enough on businesses still open. Using billboards etc to communicate to general public.</p> <p><u>Ruth Taylor</u> said that documentation was circulated which had QR codes for businesses to access council website for information regarding plans/closures etc.</p> <p><u>WSTG</u> – no such documentation was circulated, it was clear that this was another failing of following up or miscommunication of ensuring Westside</p> <p><u>John</u> said that this is something that can be looked at by his team together setting up a direct email to ensure information is disseminated to all.</p>	<p>JR/RT</p>
	COUNCIL SUPPORT NEEDED IMMEDIATELY	
5	Financial Support	
5.1	<p>Financial support/package for loss of income since commencement of works since November 2021 and going forwards whilst development is underway in the immediate and surrounding areas of Westside.</p> <p>Consideration should be made to an immediate realistic financial package that will allow businesses to survive the major developmental changes over the next 3-4 years which are impacting footfall and livelihoods. If traders cannot meet fundamental overheads such as rent and rates, how will they be expected to survive. Many businesses are already struggling to meet their immediate overheads. Will the projected 30% increase mean anything if there are no businesses?</p> <p>More pre-exemptive action is required going forwards.</p> <p>How will Wolverhampton remain investable if existing landlords cannot get the rents if there are no customers?</p> <p>Formal response in a timely manner would be appreciated.</p>	

	<p><u>MP Stuart Anderson</u> said that whilst the council are in purdah, immediate action should be taken to mitigate the severe consequences of the developments that are on-going around the Westside. Communication, understanding how the council can help. He agreed that there's a direct correlation with the roadworks starting and business sales being affected. What we don't want to see is all of this regeneration, but every shop is going to be empty, so we need to look at how we can support businesses.</p> <p><u>WSTG – Des</u> Suggested that the compensation be changed to HARSHIP and that this needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Councillor Simkins will raise this accordingly for a response asap. Potentially could take 4 weeks. Consideration is sought as council elections are coming up. WSTG - Des expressed that more businesses could potentially close.</p> <p><u>Councillor Stephen Simkins</u> agreed he will guarantee liaising closely to resolve these issues to inevitably working together with WSTG input into the strategy to move forwards.</p> <p>He would like the WSTG to come back with date to share the vision of Wolverhampton. Des - Westside Traders Sub-group will set up a follow up and respond in a few days.</p>	<p>SS</p> <p>WSTG</p>
5.2	<p>Improved communication/liaison with Westside giving opportunity to provide input. Regular updates on progress and footfall monitoring. Businesses should be addressed collectively. All businesses must be treated as equal across the city.</p>	
5.3	<p>Structured advertisement of businesses/independents traders to a wider audience Proposal for advertisement of the WHOLE OF THE CITY. Westside Group of Traders are vital components to Wolverhampton City Centre as each business offers something unique to attract different customers.</p> <p>Wolverhampton Council want customers to support local businesses, but they are not giving the public the ways to do so. Whilst businesses appreciate awareness through social media, they are missing out an important generation who were a fundamental support to local businesses but have been denied access to the daily town visits. These people have now been isolated.</p>	
5.4	<p>Free Parking or a low All-Day Charge of £1</p> <p><u>WSTG- Alex & others</u> suggested that some sort of strategy to entice people to Wolverhampton may well encourage customers to return especially when retail parks such as Bently are free parking, hence making them more attractive.</p> <p><u>WSTG</u> feel strongly that all the actions of the council moving market, bustops, taxis etc has taken footfall away from Westside. This has been going on since the plug was pulled on Summer Row. This area has been constantly disregarded. <u>WSTG</u> have asked that the council to act as a matter of urgency to consider a strategy as to how they can return footfall to Westside.</p>	<p>SS/JR/IW</p>

5.5	Area itself is blighted by empty shops and now by development work which we understand needs to happen, but is severely impacting businesses.	
5.5	What other private investor works are being carried out? What if any, are there timescales I.e., Old Beattie's building. Further renovations above existing businesses etc.	
5.7	Clear proposals as to how flow of footfall will be managed and directed towards Westside ensuring connectivity as transport no longer gives visibility to customers.	
6. AOB		
6.1	WSTG – Dave raised that as a charity he is still having to pay full business rates. Contact details of all businesses to be provided to JR, IW & BID	WSTG
6.2	Isobel – said that council issued business rate relief and this shouldn't be the case and will address it directly with him.	IW
6.3	WSTG – Salop St. barrier blockages preventing access to businesses Also the pavement have decreased to a level where scooters cannot park or access safely. It was also clear that Megan was not able to completely support businesses as she was also reliant on the council for information.	
6.4	John said that this can be looked at immediately though there may be Health and Safety considerations to be made.	JR
	WSTG – Nico suggested doing more street event once pedestrianisation is complete to bring more activity to this side as opposed to Queen St, Dudley St. Also suggested digital marketing Eg Pokemon, which has worked well in Walsall. Isobel – responded by saying that is exactly why they are creating more event space.	IS
6.5	WSTG - Andrew Lowton asked that council make it clear as to information they require from WSTG businesses to process Hardship/compensation to ensure minimal delays. Councillor Simkins did say that process would, if any, potentially be similar to that of Covid, where losses would need to be demonstrated. Clarity to be given. WSTG - Nico stated that Cashflow is a significant issues for businesses and the council should look to reallocate some of the pots of money to mitigate losses as monies will be going back to council/government in the form of rates, tax etc. This needs to be done with urgency. WSTG many tradrers are putting their own money into their businesses to meet overhead commitments such rages, rents rates. This cannot be sustained as businesses continue to close. WSTG - Bruce - suggested that the council actually take more of an active role in project management of developments. John said they would consider whether Eurovia need to have more management input from council to ensure effective communication and logistical planning is done with consideration to businesses. This needs to be policed and monitored by council. WSTG require that the onus be placed on the council to return footfall into the westside area. The logistical breakdown in communication needs appropriate chain of command which actively responds to WSTG. Councillor Simkins did reiterate that "drag" economy is being looked at where	SS JR SS/IW

	<p>activities/events occur between 4pm-11pm to encourage customers into the city..</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He also actioned his own team to ensure that issues are effectively resolved and businesses should not have to wait months to hear replies. -Furthermore, he would personally listen to WSTG concerns and wishes to.kove forward. -He will to back to the council regarding the Hardhsip to see what can be done and respond accordingly back to WSTG. <p>CS BID stated that they have been raising some of these issues for a while now and feels that opportunities have been missed. BID are happy to support businesses as it is important to relay standard information to customers so a cohesive picture is given out from all the developments going on.</p> <p>WSTG – to work more closely with support via BID and council to ensure WSTG issues are resolved</p>	<p>CS,WSTG & JR</p>
6. Dates of Next Meetings		