

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

Report of the Executive
Director Development,
Environment & Culture

Cabinet Response to the Scrutiny Report: Is the Council's Approach to Regenerating Barnsley Town Centre Working?

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To respond to the recommendations and conclusions set out in the overview and scrutiny report presented at Cabinet on 12/03/14 (Cab.12.3.2014/6).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **Cabinet agree the responses to each of the recommendations and conclusions as outlined.**

3. Introduction

- 3.1 The scrutiny review was timely and focussed on the future regeneration of the town centre. The investigation incorporated a wide range of interviews with the Council, partners and market traders. Evidence also took into account the Mary Portas study into the future of town centres and also the Grimsey review which focussed on the future potential of non retail activity for town centres.

4. Specific recommendations and responses

- 4.1 A number of recommendations and general conclusions were made, with a suggested response for each:

(6.1) The introduction of new schemes in the Town Centre such as the Interchange, the Civic/Mandela Gardens and the Barnsley Pals Centenary Square have helped to maintain good visitor numbers and the introduction of further non-retail developments, including 'public realm' initiatives, are to be welcomed.

Response:

Agreed - As part of the town centre scheme other public realm improvements are already either under way or planned.

(6.2) In order to complement the above initiatives, the recent improvements to the signage around the Town Centre is very welcome, and support is given to further enhancement of the signage, particularly signage relating to the availability of car parking, as and when

resources allow, bearing in mind it is a critical part of the visitor experience.

Response

Agreed. The point around car parking signage and entry points to the town centre has been raised in consultation meetings and will be picked up in the car parking strategy and improvements.

(6.3) Good use is made of the limited finances available for publicity purposes and support is given to the ongoing commitment to generate effective publicity, particularly now that the Town Centre 'offer' is significantly improved by the new initiatives outlined above.

Response

Agreed. As part of the town centre regeneration work is ongoing looking at marketing, promotion and creation of events to attract increased footfall to Barnsley town centre.

(6.4) There are key buildings likely to be demolished soon, including the former South Yorkshire County Council offices and the removal of these buildings should greatly enhance the Town Centre, although it is important that the sites are then made attractive if no building work is immediately envisaged, as poorly maintained spaces (and empty shops) can be very unattractive for visitors.

Response

Agreed. As part of the consultation phase work is progressing in developing the demolition plans and also what will replace the buildings demolished. This point is welcomed and will be addressed through suitable plans for the public realm areas and also attracting new retail and leisure opportunities.

(6.5) The Market is critical to the future of the Town Centre as a whole and, in the short term, the ideal solution is to bring forward the present market scheme with the additional retail capacity. This would then boost the confidence of those wishing to invest in the Town Centre in retail or other activity. However, should this scheme not come to fruition it is suggested that momentum be maintained by considering alternative options, possibly involving the improvement of the Market itself in the first instance with other developments at a later date, depending on the future financial situation. The submission from the Barnsley Branch of the NMTF, and the subsequent discussion with senior representatives of the Branch, demonstrated the good working relationship with the Council and key partners. It was noted that the Market attracts young people as well as older people and this is a very important characteristic to maintain as is partnership working to enhance the market 'offer' so as to attract a cross section of visitors. This is vital to its future sustainability and the sustainability of the whole of the Town Centre.

Response

Agreed. The market is central to the town centre regeneration scheme. The consultation work builds upon the strong relationships with the market traders and they are fully involved in the design, location and operational working of

the market. The point regarding attracting young people is well made and further work will be consideration to provide incentives for young people.

However, it is not about additional retail capacity but more about increasing the quality of the retail offer. In relation to young people more consultation and marketing is needed to attract more young people into the market as customers or traders.

(6.6) It is important that the investment plan pursued by the Council is realistic and recognises the present limitations relating to the availability of both public and private sector funding.

Response

Agreed. The town centre scheme relies on a significant investment and lead role by the Council. The Council has already been successful in leveraging in European funding for public realm improvements, bids have submitted into the City Region and private sector investment is expected once more detail is available on potential investment areas for retail and leisure opportunities.

(6.7) The present structures in place for the management of the Town Centre appear robust and the work of the Town Centre Management Team in working with partners, including businesses and traders, appears to provide a very good backdrop for driving forward further improvements.

Response

Agreed. The consultation includes a range of partners, local businesses, councillors and members of the public. This will help to strengthen partnership working and ensure the town centre scheme is fit for purpose and meets future customer need.

(6.8) The Council adopts a good flexible approach to developing packages to help businesses in the short term and this appears to be successful in attracting high occupancy levels in the Town Centre despite the challenging current economic position for traders. This flexible approach should help to attract a greater range of businesses once the situation with the present town centre scheme is resolved.

Response

Agreed. The town centre already has relatively high occupancy levels however there is scope for improvement in terms of quality and customer offer. A retail audit of existing provision has been undertaken in conjunction with the Chamber and Chronicle which will help to inform how businesses can be supported and new businesses attracted into Barnsley.

(6.9) The provision of adequate car parking around the Town Centre is an important way of encouraging good footfall and steps should be taken to maintain car parking capability in the future. Should finance be identified to meet the installation costs, the introduction of 'pay on exit' charging facilities at the multi storey car park by the Market could be a very useful improvement. There is clear merit in retaining free parking at weekends, even though there is a cost to the Council, as this helps to maintain footfall and encourages business activity.

Response

The provision of car parking is a factor but footfall is more about the quality of the retail and leisure offer. The car parking strategy for the town centre will look at ensuring car parking is good quality, sufficient spaces, includes easy to pay facilities and is safe and secure. During the consultation phase the quality of car parking is seen as a key asset and particularly at the key entry and exit points to the town. The provision of free parking whilst seen as attractive can also have negative impacts for customers so further work is being undertaken in terms of the car park strategy.

(6.10) The increasing popularity of internet shopping is likely to continue and this could increase the need to consider the use of accommodation in the Town Centre for appropriate non-retail purposes. The provision of attractions such as cinemas and restaurants should be encouraged as they have potential to attract families who are then more likely to become regular visitors to the Town Centre.

Response

Agreed. With the current forecast reduction in retail use it is essential the town centre has a range of leisure attractions to ensure footfall such as restaurants, social activities and events in the town.

5. Implications for local people / service users

- 5.1 The findings from the scrutiny review will directly inform the town centre regeneration plans which are being shaped through consultation with local people, businesses and partner organisations.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Director of Finance Property & Information Services. There are no Financial implications arising from this report.

7. Communications and consultation implications

- 7.1 The town centre regeneration scheme includes a communications and consultation plan with regular items in the local press, surveys and a town centre drop in location.

8. Community Strategy and the Council's Performance Management Framework

- 8.1 Growing the economy is a key council priority and regeneration of the town centre will help to achieve this through investment into the town, employment opportunities, attracting visitors and bringing in additional income to the town.

9. Promoting Equality & Diversity and Social Inclusion

- 9.1 There are a number of equality and diversity issues surrounding any town centre scheme. An equality impact assessment will be prepared as part of the town centre plans.

10. Reduction of Crime & Disorder

10.1 A safe and secured by design town centre will be essential in making sure visitors, businesses and local people want to come into the town. Close links already exist with South Yorkshire Police to ensure where issues are identified a proactive response is provided.

11. Background Papers

Overview and scrutiny review report on the town centre scheme received by Cabinet in March 2014 (Cab.12.3.2014/6).

Office Contact: Matt Gladstone Telephone No: x3445 Date: May 2014

Financial Implications / Consultation *Given from* Date: *23/5/14*
Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Director of Finance
Property & Information Services

(Cab.12.3.2014/6)

Report of the Director of Legal and Governance on behalf of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet on 12th March, 2014

'Is the Council's Approach to Regenerating Barnsley Town Centre Working?'

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the findings and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's investigation undertaken by the Economy Task and Finish Group (TFG) on the future regeneration of the Town Centre. The TFG was invited to do this study by the OSC on 30th July, 2013 as part of the overall work programme it approved for the three TFGs established for the 2013/14 Council Year.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 That Cabinet considers the conclusions and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a result of its investigation on 'Is the Council's Approach to Regenerating the Town Centre Working?' which are set out in paragraph 6 of this report.

3.0 What The TFG Looked At

3.1 In order to pull together the significant amount of information available about the regeneration of town centres generally, and Barnsley Town Centre specifically, we held an initial scoping session on 5th September, 2013 and considered, in particular, the following documents:-

- (a) the Barnsley Town Centre Action Plan forms part of the Local Development Framework/Local Plan suite of documents and contains specific proposals for the future use of areas and sites in the central core of the Town Centre and also key 'gateway' locations that are vital to the future 'well being' of the Town Centre itself,
- (b) the Economic Strategy 2012-2033, approved by Cabinet on 6th June, 2012 contains a number of key priorities. This Strategy concerns the whole of the Borough but does contain a specific target to 'develop a vibrant Town centre with a strong and growing retail and leisure offer, a thriving and balanced business community with a series of attractions and facilities to create a major visitor draw'. The Strategy then outlines the main themes for consideration in meeting this ambitious goal:-

- (i) successful delivery of the Marketplace Barnsley project,
 - (ii) prioritising key development sites and under-utilised buildings
 - (iii) preparation/delivery of the Barnsley Town centre action plan-(a)above refers,
 - (iv) delivering public realm initiatives including providing opportunities for private investment,
 - (v) establishing innovative partnerships with other organisations/groups to bring forward initiatives bearing in mind the Council has limited resources to act as a sole funder,
- (c) the recommendations of the Mary Portas study into the future of town centre retail areas,
 - (d) the report published by Bill Grimsey (a retail expert in the food and diy sectors) commenting on the future use of town centres, particularly the potential for non-retail activity, and
 - (e) the relevant information contained in the 'Growing the Economy' section of Corporate Plan performance reports being submitted to Cabinet, particularly the progress being made towards the outcome statement to 'develop a vibrant Town Centre' and the three associated indicators of (i) footfall in the Town Centre, (ii) occupancy levels of retail units in the Town centre and (iii) Town Centre events.

4. How the TFG Approached This Investigation - Discussion With Key Witnesses and Walk Around the Town Centre

- 4.1 Following the initial scoping session referred to in paragraph 3.1 above the TFG met on 16th September, 2013 with:-

Mahmood Azam, Assistant Director - Development
 Mark Lynam, Head of Regeneration
 Anne Untisz, Town Centre Services Manager
 Sarah McHale, Principal Development Officer, Remaking Barnsley

- 4.2 In order to get a real sense of the current activity in the Town Centre, the TFG undertook a walk around the Town Centre on 9th October visiting key locations, including the Market area.

- 4.3 On 8th November the TFG met with Sir Steve Houghton, the Leader of the Council and Mahmood Azam, Assistant Director, Development who gave us valuable insight into the current position on the markets development and other initiatives in the Town Centre, including the proposals of Barnsley College on the Central Library site,
- 4.4 A further meeting of the TFG was held on 18th November, 2013 with (a) Councillor Roy Miller, Cabinet Spokesperson for Development, Environment and Culture who gave an outline of the recent developments and future plans in the Town Centre, together with the continuing efforts being made to support the Market pending the redevelopment, and (b) representatives of the Barnsley Branch of the National Market Traders Federation - Geoff Blackburn (President), Marie Blackburn, and Peter Kwapisz (Vice President) who, as well as giving a written submission, also came 'in person' to discuss the plans for the Town Centre, particularly the future of the Market.
- 4.5 The TFG acknowledged that a number of recent initiatives had enhanced the appeal of the Town Centre including the new Transport interchange, the Barnsley Civic/Mandela Gardens and the very recently completed Town Hall open space on the former Lancaster Gate car park.
- 4.6 The TFG noted that, in order to enhance the Town Centre 'offer' signage in the area had recently been improved and would be further enhanced when appropriate finance could be identified.
- 4.7 The TFG heard that vacancy levels in the Town Centre for commercial properties is low and occupancy rates have recently increased. The Council offers competitive lease arrangements for the properties it owns, this has helped to keep occupancy levels high and minimise the detrimental environmental and aesthetic effects of vacant properties. However it was recognised that, inevitably, there are parts of the Town Centre where the retail property was not in high demand, including The Arcade and Albert Street.
- 4.8 Whilst recognising that business rate levels were determined nationally, the TFG welcomed the successful use by the Council of incentives to attract businesses into its property in the Town Centre. However offering incentives to new traders could disadvantage existing traders if they were on less attractive leasing terms and trading in a similar line of business. This issue also applies to market stalls and we recognised there has to be a balance between encouraging new traders but also providing a basis for existing businesses to flourish.

- 4.9 The TFG welcomed the Council's work in supporting businesses through incentives such as the 'My Barnsley' and special offer 'vouchers' schemes which help to maintain and improve footfall in the Town Centre.
- 4.10 The TFG acknowledged that, whilst commercial property occupancy levels were high, there were few attractions in the Town centre for young families, particularly in the late afternoon/early period. The introduction of family orientated restaurants and other non-retail businesses might help to encourage families into the Town Centre.
- 4.11 The TFG supported the important work of the Town Team Executive, comprising key partners including the Police and the Transport Authority/public transport providers. The Executive meets regularly to discuss town centre issues and has 'Barnsley Voice' as its forum for retailers. The Portas paper recommends such bodies be established and we believe there are great benefits in having a body that can discuss matters of mutual interest about the Barnsley Town Centre and can act as a sounding board for ideas relating to future developments.
- 4.12 The TFG were encouraged that opportunities to provide more public realm initiatives in the Town centre were being pursued whenever possible. We believed that open spaces in the Town Centre were important and were a fundamental part of the 'offer' to maintain and increase footfall.
- 4.13 The TFG felt the introduction of free car parking at weekends was a very good initiative and helped to make the Town Centre more attractive to visitors. However we noted that there was evidence to suggest that parking spaces within this initiative were used by workers rather than shoppers, since workers tended to arrive first. We did wonder if there was scope to introduce a nominal charge of say £1 for four hours to try to preserve key parking places for use by shoppers and other visitors. We also thought that the introduction of 'pay on exit' facilities at the multi storey car park by the Market would be a useful enhancement although it was acknowledged there would be a cost involved. We heard that the income from car parking charges forms an important part of the Council's budget and any reduction in income could have implications elsewhere in the budget.
- 4.14 The TFG were informed that coach parking facilities were important for attracting 'out of Borough' visitors to the Market and other attractions, and there was scope in the future to develop visitor packages that included retail and non-retail elements, for example a package involving the Market and the Experience Barnsley initiative at the Town Hall.

5. Barnsley Market

- 5.1 The TFG recognised that Barnsley Market is a very significant part of the Town Centre and it represents a unique attraction that people from within and outside the Borough visit. In view of this, some of our discussions about the regeneration of the Town Centre focussed on the future of this important asset.
- 5.2 The TFG were informed that the Market attracts mainly older people but there are areas and individual stalls that are visited by younger people and we felt that maintaining a mix was vital to its future prosperity and longevity,
- 5.3 The TFG recognised the efforts made by officers to fix the rents for stalls at a competitive level as trader numbers were important in maintaining footfall. Some traders had been offered reduced terms pending the new development to try to maintain the vibrancy of the existing market,
- 5.4 The TFG felt that 'special markets' and other events in the Town Centre were a key component for bringing people into the Town Centre who might not otherwise visit, although we recognised the point raised to officers by long term traders that special markets had potential to affect their business,
- 5.5 The TFG welcomed the ongoing improvements being made to the existing Markets complex, including improved access to the first floor entrance from Cheapside, improved signage and the installation of environmentally friendly LED lighting. This ensures all health and safety requirements are being met and crucially, helps to maintain trader and visitor numbers pending the introduction of the new Market scheme. However we noted that, due to the impending new scheme, much of the maintenance currently being done is reactive rather than planned and is therefore perhaps more expensive,
- 5.6 The TFG learnt that the Open Market was not performing as well as the Market Hall and the semi-open Market area and this is something that the new scheme would address,
- 5.7 The TFG welcomed the fact that a condition survey is being done to predict any future work required and in readiness for assessing the demolition works that would be necessary when the scheme commences for the new market scheme.
- 5.8 The TFG noted that the extensive service area underneath the market itself provides income to the Council by providing storage space and car parking accommodation, however this basement area will have to be borne in mind when considering any future building work,

- 5.9 The TFG heard from Councillor Sir Steve Houghton, the Leader of the Council, about the efforts being made to drive forward the Markets project with the 1249 Partnership. We felt that bringing the scheme to fruition was vital to the future improvement of the Town Centre as a whole and we supported the view that, should the discussions not prove successful, an alternative strategy is necessary to ensure there is no stagnation and loss of traders and footfall.
- 5.10 The TFG heard that an alternative strategy could possibly involve the introduction of a smaller scheme refurbishing mainly the market itself and this might be more attractive and less risky to private investors. However we noted that careful consideration would be necessary of the financial implications of any scheme brought forward as the Council itself was likely to have limited resources, particularly in the short/medium term.
- 5.11 The TFG were very grateful for the submission provided by the Barnsley Branch of the National Market Traders Federation about the current situation regarding the Market for traders and the development proposals currently envisaged.

Their submission touched on the following points:-

- (a) the efforts being made by the Federation to support the Council and the 1249 Partnership to bring forward the market development proposals,
- (b) the extensive promotional activity the Federation and the Council undertake to make people aware of the wide range of goods available in the Market, including the Federation's purchase of a stall erected on Fridays to allow traders to 'showcase' goods on a rotating basis,
- (c) the efforts made to attract new traders into the Market and the involvement of the local Federation in the national 'New Trader of the Year' competition,
- (d) the acknowledgement that 'special markets' could provide additional footfall, but some had expressed concern that the takings of established businesses could be affected particularly when the Precinct area is congested and the greater use of May Day Green for special markets might help to alleviate this issue,

- (e) the concerns relating to any proposal to move the Open Market onto the Precinct as it is believed that the market as a whole should not be split,
- (f) the operational difficulties many traders have in supporting longer opening hours as many operate as sole traders,
- (g) the fact that the Market does attract good numbers of young people, particularly at certain stalls, and the idea that it is only visited by older people is an unfortunate misconception, and
- (h) the Federation and the Council work well in partnership and the Federation is active in promoting the Market with trade holding well given the recession and the impending development proposals,

5.12 The TFG heard verbally from the representatives of the Barnsley Branch of the NMTF about the importance of the steps taken to promote and publicise the Market and the types of initiatives the Branch and the Council are using to highlight the wide range of goods available in the Market. The opportunity for Market traders to use on-line promotional activity in partnership with the Council such as 'twitter' and, from next year 'facebook' was cited as a welcome initiative. It was acknowledged that some individual traders are now using on-line facilities as part of their business activity. However on line internet shops do provide competition for more traditional retailers, including Market traders. We heard the Branch had supported the redevelopment proposals and had worked with the Council to keep the present Market as a buoyant entity, however the current uncertainty was bound to some impact. We heard that the Branch felt, some a short term improvements to the current Market area would be helpful and cited better lighting as a possible top priority.

5.13 The TFG were also grateful to Councillors Paul Hand-Davis, Ralph Sixsmith and Wayne Johnson for undertaking a survey of people in the Precinct on 1st November which provided a good snapshot of the views of visitors in response fourteen questions about the market and the Town Centre as a whole. (More detailed information about the results of the survey is attached to this report).

6. Conclusions And Recommendations

The following are the conclusions and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group:-

- 6.1 The introduction of new schemes in the Town Centre such as the Interchange, the Civic/Mandela Gardens and the Barnsley Pals Centenary Square have helped to maintain good visitor numbers and the introduction of further non-retail developments, including 'public realm' initiatives, are to be welcomed,
- 6.2 In order to complement the above initiatives, the recent improvements to the signage around the Town Centre is very welcome, and support is given to further enhancement of the signage, particularly signage relating to the availability of car parking, as and when resources allow, bearing in mind it is a critical part of the visitor experience.
- 6.3 Good use is made of the limited finances available for publicity purposes and support is given to the ongoing commitment to generate effective publicity, particularly now that the Town Centre 'offer' is significantly improved by the new initiatives outlined in 5.1 above,
- 6.4 There are key buildings likely to be demolished soon, including the former South Yorkshire County Council offices and the removal of these buildings should greatly enhance the Town Centre, although it is important that the sites are then made attractive if no building work is immediately envisaged, as poorly maintained spaces (and empty shops) can be very unattractive for visitors,
- 6.5 The Market is critical to the future of the Town Centre as a whole and, in the short term, the ideal solution is to bring forward the present market scheme with the additional retail capacity. This would then boost the confidence of those wishing to invest in the Town Centre in retail or other activity. However, should this scheme not come to fruition it is suggested that momentum be maintained by considering alternative options, possibly involving the improvement of the Market itself in the first instance with other developments at a later date, depending on the future financial situation. The submission from the Barnsley Branch of the NMTF, and the subsequent discussion with senior representatives of the Branch, demonstrated the good working relationship with the Council and key partners. It was noted that the Market attracts young people as well as older people and this is a very important characteristic to maintain as is partnership working to enhance the market 'offer' so as to attract a cross section of visitors. This is vital to its future sustainability and the sustainability of the whole of the Town Centre,
- 6.6 It is important that the investment plan pursued by the Council is realistic and recognises the present limitations relating to the availability of both public and private sector funding,

- 6.7 The present structures in place for the management of the Town Centre appear robust and the work of the Town Centre Management Team in working with partners, including businesses and traders, appears to provide a very good backdrop for driving forward further improvements,
- 6.8 The Council adopts a good flexible approach to developing packages to help businesses in the short term and this appears to be successful in attracting high occupancy levels in the Town Centre despite the challenging current economic position for traders. This flexible approach should help to attract a greater range of businesses once the situation with the present town centre scheme is resolved,
- 6.9 The provision of adequate car parking around the Town Centre is an important way of encouraging good footfall and steps should be taken to maintain car parking capability in the future. Should finance be identified to meet the installation costs, the introduction of 'pay on exit' charging facilities at the multi storey car park by the Market could be a very useful improvement. There is clear merit in retaining free parking at weekends, even though there is a cost to the Council, as this helps to maintain footfall and encourages business activity, and
- 6.10 The increasing popularity of internet shopping is likely to continue and this could increase the need to consider the use of accommodation in the Town Centre for appropriate non-retail purposes. The provision of attractions such as cinemas and restaurants should be encouraged as they have potential to attract families who are then more likely to become regular visitors to the Town Centre.

7. Witnesses

- 7.1 The Task and Finish Group thanked the following for their assistance:-

Sir Steve Houghton, Leader of the Council

Councillor Roy Miller, Cabinet Member for Development, Environment and Culture

Matt Gladstone, Executive Director for Development , Environment and Culture (discussion with the Lead Member of the Group)

Mahmood Azam, Assistant Director, Development

Anne Untisz, Town Centre Manager

Sarah McHale, Principal Development Officer, Remaking Barnsley

Geoff and Marie Blackburn and Peter Kwapisz, Barnsley Branch of the NMTF (including the written submission)

8. Background Papers

Barnsley Town Centre Action Plan

Economic Strategy 2012-33

Corporate Plan Performance Reports ('growing the economy' section)

Mary Portas Report - Future of Town Centre Retail Areas

Bill Grimsey Report - Future Use of Town Centres

Survey undertaken by Members of the Task and Finish Group - attached

9. Members of the Task and Finish Group

Councillors:-

Paul Hand-Davis (Lead Member)

Philip Birkinshaw

Lesley Duerden

Martin Dyson

Wayne Johnson

Ralph Sixsmith

Peter Starling

Sarah Tattersall

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