

## **TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND INITIATIVES**

**Submitted by:** Neale Clifton, Executive Director, Regeneration and Development

**Portfolio:** Cuts across most Cabinet Portfolios but predominantly focussed around Regeneration and Planning – Councillor Robin Studd

**Ward affected:** Town centre - directly with impacts upon wider areas of the Borough

### **Purpose of the Report**

To update Members on the activities of the embryonic town centre partnership and seek approval for council involvement and / or action in respect of the following emerging initiatives:

- (a) The council becoming a director of the town centre partnership company (not-for-profit and limited by guarantee).
- (b) Submission of a bid in response to the Government's invitation to become a "Portas Pilot".
- (c) Taking part in national campaigns to support street markets and independent retailers.
- (d) Consulting users (and non-users) of Newcastle town centre as to why they do/do not visit the town and, in particular, the effect of parking charges on their decision.

### **Recommendations**

(a) That Cabinet agree to Newcastle under Lyme B.C. becoming a director of the Newcastle town centre partnership company and authorises officers to take the necessary steps to facilitate the same; the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning would represent the Council on the company.

(b) That Cabinet agrees to officers working under the auspices of the Newcastle town centre partnership to prepare and submit a bid to become a "Portas pilot", in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning and for the Council to act as the accountable body for administering any grant.

(c) That Cabinet agrees to the Council's involvement in campaigns to support the safeguarding and growth of markets (e.g. Love your local market) and independent retailers (Independents' month in July) by running our own campaign themed around what Newcastle town centre has to offer for shoppers, visitors and those interested in starting a new business, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning.

(d) That Cabinet agrees to the preparation and execution of a town centre user survey, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning.

### **Reasons**

Agreeing to all these actions will significantly strengthen the town centre partnership, assist the partnership in delivering actions of benefit to the town centre economy and further the aim of working towards the establishment of a Business Improvement District for Newcastle Town Centre. Applications to become a Portas pilot town have to be submitted by 30 March 2012.

## 1. **Background**

- 1.1 The formalisation of a Newcastle Town Centre Partnership is a clear objective of the Council's Corporate Plan and Transformation Programme, the purpose of which is "to examine the case for establishing a Business Improvement District (BID) in the town centre

to provide additional resources/capacity to secure enhanced services (including the provision of marketing) and to improve the viability of Newcastle Town Centre for the benefit of both the businesses and residents.”

- 1.2 The Town Centre Partnership (TCP) pre-board was set up in 2011, in response to recommendations from the Strategic Investment Framework (SIF) for the town centre. At present the TCP comprises representatives from the Chamber of Trade & Enterprise, Partnership Against Business Crime, Newcastle under Lyme BC, the New Vic Theatre, the Roebuck Shopping Centre, Keele University, independent retailers and the commercial sector.
- 1.3 The TCP pre-board has identified a number of project areas, which it feels are significant to the future improvement of the town centre’s fortunes. These are;
  - setting up of a formal identity as a company limited by guarantee;
  - town centre events (establishing an annual programme to generate footfall);
  - the street market (re-invigorating it both in appearance and commodities);
  - parking (type, quality and cost considerations);
  - safety;
  - the development of the Ryecroft site;
  - communications (and marketing) and;
  - the involvement (and presence) of Keele University in the town.

Each area is championed by a member of the pre-board, with a link to the appropriate officer within the council.

## 2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The TCP has reached a point where a number of actions need to take place in order for it to move forward. The first of these is incorporation, which means that the TCP can set up bank accounts, manage its own funding and begin to recruit members. However, the TCP feels that it is vital to have the full commitment of the Council and so is reluctant to proceed with incorporation unless the Council is able to become a director. Your officers consider the establishment of a formal company for the stated purposes would be consistent with the Council’s stated objective of pursuing a Business Improvement District set within the wider priority of “A Borough of opportunity”.
- 2.2 The TCP pre-board has discussed a number of initiatives that, if taken forward, could have a significant impact on the economic well-being of the town centre. For example, a sub-group set up to look at the issue of parking wants to survey users and non-users of the town centre about what influences their decision to visit the town, which will feed into the development of new projects. Any evidence gathered through such a consultation would assist the Council in reviewing matters such as the operation and management of its car parks but other lines of questioning would be included to enable consideration of wider issues.
- 2.3 Given the challenging current economic conditions and the limited availability of funding (from both the private and public sectors), a number of low-cost, innovative, ideas for increasing retail business start-ups are being explored. Also good progress has been made in establishing a programme of themed town centre events which aim to increase footfall and dwell time in the town centre in the expectation that visitors will spend more in the range of town centre businesses. The TCP has been established to strengthen the co-ordination and management of such events, involving both the private and public sector partners. It should be noted that, whilst there is a significant focus upon improving the town centre’s retail function, the TCP recognises the importance of broadening the appeal of the town centre by

seeking to enhance other social, cultural and employment opportunities in the town. At the time of writing an increasing range of interested parties from the public sector and third sector organisations have become involved in such initiatives.

- 2.4 Additionally the Government has announced a number of national initiatives which the partners are keen to review. Most notable is the Government's invitation to become a "Town Team" (a "Portas pilot"); up to £100,000 is available to support the establishment of 12 pilot schemes that will test the ideas in the "Portas Review" with the main objective being to strengthen the high street (town centre); applications have to be submitted by 30 March 2012.
- 2.5 Members can access the Portas Review online at [www.communities.gov.uk/portasreview](http://www.communities.gov.uk/portasreview) and the application form for the Portas Pilots is available at [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/regeneration/portaspilotprospectus](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/regeneration/portaspilotprospectus). Other initiatives include "Independents Month" (promoting local independent businesses) and a national campaign to promote Markets.

### 3. **Options Considered**

- 3.1 Options considered for the Council becoming a director of the Town Centre Partnership
  - 3.1.1 No formal involvement with the company - the TCP is unlikely to go ahead as the other partners feel it is essential that the Council shows its full commitment to the partnership (not recommended).
  - 3.1.2 Become a member but not a director of the partnership – the Council will have no direct control over the decision-making processes of the partnership (not recommended).
  - 3.1.3 Become a director of the company – the Council has a seat on the board and can directly influence the decision-making processes (recommended). The related consideration would be to agree who would represent the Council; officers would recommend that it should be the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning with support provided by relevant officers.
- 3.2 Options considered for the submission of a Portas Pilot bid.
  - 3.2.1 Not submit a bid – miss out on the possibility of gaining up to £100,000 to improve the economic well-being of the town centre; indicate to potential members that the TCP is not capable of or not serious about effecting change in the town (not recommended).
  - 3.2.2 Submitting a bid – potential of becoming a Portas pilot with all the attendant benefits of galvanising the emerging partnership with some pump-prime funding (recommended). Involvement of an increasing range of partners, including the County Council (thereby demonstrating the strength of leadership in the 2-tier Local Government arrangement), should enhance the quality of any bid and enable any learning / experience to be rolled out into other parts of the Borough.
- 3.3 Options considered for taking part in national campaigns to support markets and independent retailers (Love your Local Market and Independents' Month)
  - 3.3.1 Not take part in campaigns – indicates to town centre businesses that the Council does not support activities to promote the town centre (not recommended).
  - 3.3.2 Take part in a limited way (using existing resources) – a small campaign taking advantage of two already planned events, supplemented by posters, press releases and social media

campaign could be carried out using existing resources (possible but recommended only if the third option is not agreed).

- 3.3.3 Take full advantage of the national campaign by running our own campaign themed around what Newcastle town centre has to offer for shoppers, visitors and those interested in starting a new business – this would include events, more significant promotion and business support activities specifically aimed at retailers and market traders. Funding for this campaign could be made available from the publicity budget in support of the ‘Borough of Opportunity’ priority (recommended). If any bid to become a Portas Pilot is successful it is anticipated that there would be a significant strand of activity around such campaigns.
- 3.4 Options considered regarding a survey of users (and non-users) of Newcastle town centre as to why they do/do not visit the town, including the effect of parking charges on their decision.
  - 3.4.1 Not conduct the survey – The idea for the survey has come from the TCP to help them better understand why people visit the town, including the effect that parking operation and charging has on the decision. If it is not carried out it may be difficult for the TCP to identify interventions that would improve the prosperity of the town (not recommended).
  - 3.4.2 Carry out the survey – will help to understand who uses the town centre, when they use it and why, and the impact of considerations such as parking charges on their decisions; will demonstrate that the Council as part of the TCP is committed to working with partners to find solutions to issues (recommended). For the sake of clarity it would be prudent to incorporate a range of lines of questioning relating to all aspects of the town centre offer.

#### 4. **Proposal**

- 4.1 That the Cabinet agree to Newcastle under Lyme B.C. becoming a director of the Newcastle town centre partnership company and authorises officers to take the necessary steps to facilitate the same; the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning would represent the Council on the company.
- 4.2 That the Cabinet agrees to officers working under the auspices of the Newcastle town centre partnership to prepare and submit a bid to become a “Portas pilot”, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning and for the Council to act as the accountable body for administering any grant.
- 4.3 That Cabinet agrees to the Council’s involvement in campaigns to support the safeguarding and growth of markets (e.g. Love your local market) and independent retailers (Independents’ month in July) by running our own campaign themed around what Newcastle town centre has to offer for shoppers, visitors and those interested in starting a new business, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning.
- 4.4 That Cabinet agrees to the preparation and execution of a town centre user survey, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning.

#### 5. **Purpose of Proposal**

- 5.1 Together these proposals will significantly affect the ability of the TCP to effect positive change in the town centre and demonstrate the commitment of the council to both the TCP and the future of the town centre.

## 6. **Outputs and Outcomes**

- 6.1 Becoming a director of the TCP – limits liability of the Council; positive impression of the Council.
- 6.2 Submitting a Portas Pilot bid – potential to gain up to £100,000 funding, plus additional benefits, for town centre activities
- 6.3 Campaign to support markets (Love your Local market) and independent retailers (Independents' month in July) – positive impression of Council, possible increase in business start-ups, more market traders, increased footfall in town, greater awareness of Newcastle as a place to start a business.
- 6.4 Survey of users (and non-users) of Newcastle town centre – valuable information about who uses the town centre, when they use it and why, which will provide an evidential base for future decisions related to town centre issues.

## 7. **Timetable for Actions**

14 Mar 2012	Cabinet decision regarding directorship of TCP
30 Mar 2012	Portas pilot bid submitted
30 Apr 2012	TCP company formed
Apr 2012	Begin promotion of Love Your Local Market and Independents month campaigns
Mid May 2012	Begin town centre users survey
End May 2012	Outcome of Portas Pilot bid
23 June 2012	Love Your Local Market fortnight begins
July 2012	Independents month
Mid Aug 2012	Conclusion of town centre users survey

## 8. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 8.1 Become a director of the company – the Council has a seat on the board and can directly influence the decision-making processes
- 8.2 Submitting a Portas Pilot bid – potential of becoming a Portas pilot with all the attendant benefits.
- 8.3 Take full advantage of the national campaign by running our own campaign themed around what Newcastle town centre has to offer for shoppers, visitors and those interested in starting a new business – this would include events, more significant promotion and business support activities specifically aimed at retailers and market traders. Funding for this campaign could be made available from the Publicity budget in support of the 'Borough of Opportunity' priority.
- 8.4 Carry out the survey – will help to understand who uses the town centre, when they use it and why, along with those who don't come into the town and should identify the impact of key factors, such as parking charges, on their decisions; will demonstrate to the TCP that the council is committed to working with the business community and other key partners to find solutions to issues.

## 9. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

9.1 Outcomes from these actions will significantly affect the 'Borough of Opportunity' corporate priority, and will have implications for the quality of life, regeneration, and sustainability of the town centre, the borough as a whole and ultimately North Staffordshire.

## 10. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

10.1 There is no statutory requirement to carry out these recommendations. That said the Council would have legal and financial responsibilities in acting as the accountable body for becoming a "Portas pilot" town.

10.2 The necessary legal provisions exist for the Council to become a Director of the company. In view of the not-for-profit, limited by guarantee, nature of the proposed company there would be limited exposure of the Council other than reputational risk if the company were to fail.

## 11. **Equality Impact Assessment**

11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out but the actions identified will help to make the town centre more able to meet the needs of both residents and the business community, in particular those interested in the possibility of starting their own business.

## 12. **Financial and Resource Implications**

### 12.1 **Directorship**

12.1.1 No cost to council and should limit any future liability by becoming part of a limited liability company

12.1.2 No additional HR requirements

### 12.2 **Portas Pilot Bid**

12.2.1 Potential to bring in up to £100,000 funding for town centre projects.

12.2.2 Officer time required to produce bid, but in-kind support from partners.

12.2.3 If successful, the Council would become the accountable body and various departments would be involved in the projects developed as a result of the funding. It is anticipated that the likely nature of projects can be assimilated into existing work programmes.

### 12.3 **Love your Local Market and Independents Month**

12.3.1 A low key campaign could be funded from existing budgets. A more intensive campaign could be funded through the Corporate Publicity budget.

12.3.2 Officer time will be required to develop the programme of activities and events but much of this will be of benefit to other mainstream work areas.

### 12.4 **Conducting survey**

12.4.1 Whilst the only additional cost implication in conducting the survey is a small amount of printing (the survey will be mainly electronic), there may be implications as a result of the findings.

13. **Major Risks**

- 13.1 Becoming a director – this limits rather than increases risk. Possible reputational risk if TCP fails but potential benefits outweighs the small risk.
- 13.2 Portas Pilot bid – raising expectations if bid unsuccessful. By including the TCP in the development of the bid, expectations can be managed. Not submitting a bid would be far more harmful to the perception of the council by partners.
- 13.3 Participating in Love your Local Markets and Independents' Month campaigns – limited impact, raising expectations. The TCP is fully supportive of the campaign and will help to manage expectation.
- 13.4 Conducting survey – raising expectations amongst residents and businesses with respect to parking charges. The survey has been designed so that, whilst it does contain specific questions about parking, these are part of a wider survey, which looks at other issues.

14. **Key Decision Information**

- 14.1 The Portas Pilot bid is a key decision.
- 14.2 This report has been included on the Forward Plan.

15. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

- 15.1 Previous reports relating to the Town Centre Strategic Investment Framework.
- 15.2 Previous reports relating to specific capital investments in town centre projects.

16. **List of Appendices**

There are none.

17. **Background Papers**

The Portas Review and Prospectus for Portas Pilots (see DCLG publications).  
Newcastle Town Centre Strategic Investment Framework.  
Emerging Economic Development Strategy.  
Newcastle and Stoke on Trent Core Spatial Strategy.  
Planning Policy Statement no. 4 relating to town centres.