

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO THE
ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

14 March 2019

1. Economic Development Strategy Year 1 Action Plan (Newcastle Town Centre)

Submitted by: Regeneration and Economic Development Manager

Portfolio: Corporate and Service Improvement, People and Partnerships

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

Report on Economic Development Strategy Year 1 Action Plan, specifically actions relating to Newcastle Town Centre.

Recommendations

- **That members consider the town centre projects listed in the report and make any recommendations on the Economic Development Strategy Action Plan**

Reasons

In order to sustain and improve our town centre to increase footfall and support town centre businesses.

Background

1. Following consultation with partners and the local business community, Cabinet March 2018 approved the Economic Development Strategy 2018 – 2023 and authorised work on the Year 1 Action Plan, which was approved at Cabinet 6 June 2018. Whilst work is ongoing against this plan, it should be noted that the Economic Development Plan is due to be refreshed by Cabinet to reflect the new Council Plan adopted in the autumn of 2018.
2. The Action Plan, which is based on the four priorities of Business Intelligence and support, Place and Infrastructure/Sites and Premises, Skills and Innovation is refreshed annually and sets out in more detail how the agreed aims and objectives of the EDS will be delivered.
3. The focus of this report is specifically on the Newcastle Town Centre element of the Year 1 Action Plan. These actions are:
 - a. Work with Newcastle BID to promote the town centre as a place to visit, work and live.
 - b. Work with the developers of the Ryecroft area of town to secure a development that will add to the economic vitality of the town.
 - c. Bring forward proposals for retail and business accommodation in the town centre with priority placed on growing its professional services and a distinctive retail offer.

Issues

4. Town centres across the country are going through unprecedented change with vacancy rates increasing as more people shop on line and visit places where they can enjoy a wider experience rather than just shopping.
5. Newcastle town centre has suffered the same challenges as other towns across the County. Our town centre vacancy rate has increased significantly to over 17% which is higher than the West Mids and national averages.
6. Newcastle has lost some very significant names over the last few years, partly due to mergers, such as Argos moving into Sainsbury's, which has impacted negatively on town centre footfall, changing business models such as Burton's (Arcadia Group), Jessops, Royal Bank of Scotland responding to demand of online banking and the out of town impact of Next at Festival Park and M&S at Wolstanton retail centre.
7. The town's three covered facilities also experience high vacancies and/or turnover of tenants (Roebuck, Astley Walk, and Lymelight Boulevard). And the historic market is in need of refurbishment and rejuvenation.
8. The town's independent sector is reasonably healthy but we have lost several key businesses who were footfall attractors in their own right to the Trentham Gardens Estate.
9. Addressing these issues requires concerted effort across a range of work areas, including the three action areas presented in this report. Work on this area is also captured in the Growth Deal recently agreed with Staffordshire County Council, and under that Deal we will be progressing two linked, but discrete work packages:
 - **Healthy High St** – reflecting the trading conditions, and actions which can be taken to support economic vibrancy;
 - **Diversification** – reflecting the need to re-purpose under-utilised of redundant assets for residential and non-retail employment uses.

Work with Newcastle BID to promote the town centre as a place to visit, work and live

10. Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council continues to enjoy a positive relationship with the BID, and works in partnership with the BID to address town centre challenges. Work with the BID has focussed on developing cultural tourism in order to increase footfall in the town centre, support and attract more businesses and to secure external funding from organisations such as Arts Council England and Heritage Lottery to support this area of work.
11. The cultural offer in the town centre has grown almost out of recognition, including the following events which help to raise our profile with diverse audiences, confirming the town centre as a hub of exciting opportunities. We know that when these town centre events take place our footfall is increased and town centre businesses are supported:
 - The Lymelight Festival, led by local businesses and featuring local artists and craftspeople;
 - The Jazz & Blues festival has been revitalised;
 - The Homecoming, celebrating Newcastle's connection to Philip Astley, father of the modern circus.
 - The community led Food Fair

12. In the run up to Christmas 2018, the Council worked with the BID to devise a new programme of parking charges to help improve visits and dwell time in the town. The impact of this is covered elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.
13. We have also worked with the County Council to improve public realm in Red Lion Square, which resulted in an attractive new square where people gather to enjoy time out from their day and it enabled Newcastle to present its first outdoor photography exhibition, working with Appetite (Creative People and Places Stoke on Trent) to show the history of Circus as part of the Circus 250 national celebrations. The Red Lion Square project also won the Institution of Highway Engineers, Mercia Awards 2018 Small Project of the Year.
14. In addition to work undertaken directly with the BID, the Council is bringing forward a programme of action under the Healthy High Street concept which includes:
 - **Re-invigorating the market:** Health Check has been undertaken by the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABNA), and Cabinet will shortly consider an action plan for the market which involves a significant shift in the current management focus.
 - **Car parking** – review of parking to be undertaken by Summer 2019, with the aim to deliver a Parking Strategy which supports the town centre economy
 - **Football generators** – explore potential for further events/animation activity to enhance distinctiveness of destination, building on past success
 - **Public realm** – Ensuring we continue to have an attractive day & night time environment
 - **CCTV** – review agreed by NBC, to look at modernising the assets and enhancing coverage
 - **Virtual high street** – Explore with businesses and subject experts how to develop and exploit internet and social media capability, to put local businesses in a strong position to address changing trading environment
 - **Promotion/profile raising** – concerted effort to promote Newcastle Under Lyme as a destination

Work with the developers of the Ryecroft area of town to secure a development that will add to the economic vitality of the town:

15. The Ryecroft development has been slowed by the rapid change to retail demand in town centres. However, it remains a key regeneration priority and is reflected in the Growth Deal which Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council have signed up to. Officers are working in partnership with the County Council to promote regeneration of the town centre in order to protect and enhance the existing retail offer, reduce leakage spend and reinstate the town to its rightful place in the retail hierarchy. Ryecroft is at the heart of the partnership and we are determined to pave the way for a comprehensive scheme that provides new anchorage and reinforces local distinctiveness. Talks are currently taking place with the developers HDD to explore options for the way forward.
16. As a temporary measure we are exploring options for large scale events to take place on the site. The most recent example of this is Gandeys Circus, which builds further on our circus theme and encourages more visitors to the town centre.

Bring forward proposals for retail and business accommodation in the town centre with priority placed on growing its professional services and a distinctive retail offer:

17. This action is very much the focus of the “diversification” element of the Growth Deal outlined above, involving the repurposing of underutilised assets.

18. Council assets continue to be marketed to attract both retail and professional services. Talks are currently taking place regarding options for the upper floors of Lancaster Building. Merrial Street ground floor premises are full and upper floors in talks. Fogg Street is currently full.
19. The Guildhall has now been reopened as a Community and Voluntary sector hub, managed by Support Staffordshire to provide community services for the people of Newcastle, and attracting footfall to through the services on offer.
20. Longer term we know we have to regenerate our town centre by facilitating new and different employment opportunities, an improved cultural offer, local services, leisure facilities and housing. In order to progress this, officers are submitting a bid to the Future High Streets Fund, and will also be exploring the opportunities arising from the recently announced Supporting Towns funding which is likely to provide more detail during the summer.
21. Both these funding opportunities recognise the impact of changing retail demands on town centres and our high streets, which local areas are struggling to address.

Options

22. The only option considered is to continue to work with partners to support the town centre as this clearly fits within the corporate priority of a Town Centre for All.

Proposal

- Work with partners to secure external funding (Future High Streets Fund, Supporting Towns Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund and LEP) for the town centre specifically the Ryecroft site
- Work with the BID to secure Arts Council funding for the annual Homecoming event and other cultural events throughout the year (Heritage Lottery)
- Work with County to design new wayfinding that reflects the changes in the town centre such as Castle House and renew town centre road signage to help reduce congestion and improve air quality.
- Continue to work with HDD to find a development solution for Ryecroft
- Promote town centre council assets for retail, office and other uses to increase footfall.

Reasons for Preferred Solution

23. In order to sustain and improve our town centre offer for the benefit of our communities the Council needs to work on the above projects.

Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities

24. The actions outlined meet the corporate priority of a 'Town Centre for All'.

Legal and Statutory Implications

25. None

Equality Impact Assessment

26. There are no specific requirements however projects such as the Guildhall for Community and Voluntary use has resulted in improved access to these services right at the heart of our town

centre. Some of these customers will be vulnerable and therefore have benefitted from easy town centre access to services.

Financial and Resource Implications

27. Each project will require its own financial appraisal and allocation of funding taking into account the outcome so external funding bids and partner support.

Major Risks

28. If we do nothing it is likely the town centre will decline even further, which will impact on local job and services for the people of the Borough.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

29. The town centre signage scheme seeks to support wider objectives of clean air in the town and reducing cars queuing around the town centre.

Key Decision Information

30. This is not a key decision item.

Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

31. In March 2018 Cabinet approved the Economic Development Strategy 2018 and a further report on the Action Plan in June 2018.

List of Appendices

32. None.

Background Papers

33. Future High Streets Fund submission criteria.