

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO THE
CABINET

Date 24 April 2019

1. **REPORT TITLE** Newcastle-under-Lyme Town Centre Growth
- Submitted by:** Chief Executive – Martin Hamilton
- Portfolio:** All
- Ward(s) affected:** All

Purpose of the Report

To secure Cabinet agreement to an extensive programme for regeneration and economic growth of Newcastle-under-Lyme Town Centre.

Recommendations

Cabinet is Recommended to:

- (a) Approve the strategic approach set out in this report
- (b) Approve the programme of action set out in this report
- (c) Establish the leadership and delivery mechanisms described in section 5 of this report, and invite partner agencies to play an active role.

Reasons

Town centres across the Country are experiencing a period of intense challenge and change, reflecting the changing face of retail. Newcastle is also experiencing these challenges, and targeted action is required to arrest the recent decline and shape a strong and successful future.

1. **Background**

1.1 The Council has adopted as part of the Council Plan the priority “A Town Centre For All”, setting out the ambition for the town centre to have “the right retail, public service, leisure, cultural, business and residential facilities that work for local residents and attract visitors and businesses to the town centre.” This priority is further reiterated in the Growth Deal negotiated between the Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council. Behind these commitments lies a recognition that the town centre economy has suffered in recent years, with high street vacancy rates of 17% being among the highest in the region. The town’s historic market is equally in decline, with around 50% of stalls vacant even on its busiest days.

1.2 The Council has already taken some action to address the situation, for example introducing reduced car parking charges in the afternoons, and facilitating events such as Gandy’s Circus to drive footfall in the town. The development of the Guildhall as a community hub, through with a wide range of services are made available to the public, has also been undertaken to encourage town centre footfall. In addition, the Council

continues to work with developers and property owners towards securing improved economic conditions.

1.3 Notwithstanding this, the Council has identified that a significant programme of activity is required, with action across a range of fronts, in order to breathe life into the concept of a Town Centre For All. This report presents for Cabinet Consideration the overall strategic approach, and also sets out the governance arrangements required to ensure delivery.

2. **Issues**

2.1 Co-ordinated action will be required across a range of areas in order to deliver on the aspiration to make the town more able to meet future needs and trends. Two linked programmes of work are envisaged:

- **Healthy High St** – addressing the trading conditions, determining a suite of actions which can be taken to support economic vibrancy;
- **Diversification** – reflecting the need to bring forward residential and non-retail employment uses into currently under-utilised or redundant assets, bringing more people into the town centre to live and work.

3. **Healthy High Street**

3.1 In order to support the existing town centre economy, and encourage new businesses to the town centre, it is proposed to co-ordinate action on a range of fronts which will generate footfall, grow confidence, and help support local traders. Through detailed engagement with key stakeholders, this “Healthy High Street” programme will evolve and develop over time, addressing issues of concern, and taking advantage of opportunities as they arise. To kick start the programme, action is proposed on:

- **Re-invigorating the market:** The Council has commissioned a Health Check of the current Market by The National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA), which has generated a number of recommendations designed secure the future of the town’s historic market. An action plan will be prepared in consultation with Market Traders and the BID, which will include a fundamental shift in the current market management approach – moving away from an “estates based” approach, which treats the market as a series of pieces of real-estate to rent, to an “event based” approach, which recognises the market as a single entity which needs to be curated developed as a whole.
- **Car parking** – Cabinet has already made some strides in using its parking assets to make visiting the town centre more attractive. It is proposed to now undertake some detailed research of parking patterns in the town centre, looking at frequency of visit, dwell time, purpose, and customer satisfaction, using the intelligence gathered to bring forward a Parking Strategy by Summer 2019. Officers will also review the

opportunities to be derived from joining the ParkMark scheme, which independently assesses car parks against criteria such as – quality management, lighting, surveillance and cleanliness.

- **Footfall generators** – With the increase in internet shopping, town centres can no longer rely on their retail offer alone to drive footfall. A distinction has grown between “shopping” and “buying”, with customers increasingly using town centre space to view products, to socialise, and to experience entertainment, with the “buying” activity happening on-line, at another time. The retail offer itself is no longer sufficient to drive footfall in a town centre – rather there also needs to be cafes, restaurants, and space for informal socialising. Newcastle is well placed in this regard, with wide streets, attractive architecture, and a growing independent sector offering real variety. It is proposed to strengthen this further by working with key stakeholders to curate an ongoing programme of events and on street activity to ensure the town centre is a consistently interesting and exciting place to spend time – in essence, ensuring that it becomes a “destination”.
- **CCTV & Public realm** – Work is ongoing to improve the town centre CCTV, modernising the assets and enhancing coverage. This will be a key step to ensuring the town centre is a safe place to spend time, and a safe place to trade. Linked to this, we will co-ordinate efforts to ensure we continue to have an attractive day & night time environment, addressing issues such as begging, anti-social behaviour, levels of cleanliness, maintenance of subways, street furniture, trees and floral displays, all of which help to attract people into the town centre.
- **Business Support for On-Line Trading** – Officers will 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; This could entail both establishing a trusted trader scheme, possibly supported by a loyalty app designed to encourage people to spend more while they are in the town centre and come back more often.
- **Promotion/profile raising** – Through the Council’s Communication Team, and the communication efforts of other stakeholders, we will secure a step change in the promotion of Newcastle-under-Lyme as a destination.

4. **Diversification**

- 4.1 In addition to attracting people back into the town through improvements in the offer, it is proposed that the Council lead on diversifying land use in the town centre, encouraging residential and employment uses. This will ensure that the town centre has a growing residential and working population, underpinning the vibrancy of the town centre.

- 4.2 Of prime importance is the future of the Ryecroft site, and the Council continues to work with HDD, and their parent company U&I, to bring forward a scheme for the site. Officers have submitted an Expression of Interest for the Future High Streets Fund with a view to securing support to address some of the abnormal costs associated with this site.
- 4.3. Alongside Ryecroft the Council and its partners need to prepare a clear plan for buildings such as Lancaster Buildings, St George's Chamber, and other sites which are currently underutilised.

5. **Governance & Delivery**

- 5.1 In order to make progress it is essential that appropriate governance and delivery mechanisms are put in place. It is proposed to establish:
- Town Centre Leadership Group – tasked with providing the political leadership, setting the overall strategic direction, and monitoring progress, this group would comprise representatives of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, BID, Keele University and the Police. This group is anticipated to meet quarterly and feed into Cabinet.
 - Town Centre Taskforce - An officer body, tasked with delivering on the two work streams. For the Healthy High Street Programme, it will be desirable to include on the Steering Group other stakeholders, such as Police, BID, University, and possibly others, alongside officers from the Borough and County Council. These would not be appropriate for the Diversification Programme, which will be dealing with confidential commercial developments, where the team would comprise only officers of the two Councils.
 - Stakeholder Forum – recognising the importance of the town centre across a diverse range of stakeholders, from residents, businesses, night time economy, transportation, etc, it is proposed to establish a Stakeholder Forum to facilitate a wider debate between agencies leading on the regeneration and other stakeholders in the town centre. This forum would include invites to businesses, residents, elected members for the Town ward, and other elected members with an interest in the town centre, the community sector and young people studying in the town. This body would provide important insights for the Leadership Group.

6. **Options Considered**

- 6.1 Consideration has been given to less formal governance structures for the delivery of the programme, but given the scale, diversity, and urgency, of the programme to be delivered, a formal structure is required.

7. **Proposal**

- 7.1 It is proposed to establish the multi-agency governance structures set out above, to drive a programme of town centre rejuvenation and change, starting with the key work-streams identified above. Existing officer resources will be allocated to these work streams, with consideration of additional programme resource, and specialist input being given at a future date. Partner agencies will be invited to play an active role in the governance of this work.

8. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 8.1 Experience of delivering large scale programmes of change, of whatever nature, points to the need to establish appropriate governance arrangements to ensure success. The two work streams identified afford the Council the ability to focus on both long term and shorter term interventions to arrest and reverse the decline of the town centre.

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

- 9.1 This report relates directly to the corporate objective – A Town Centre For All.

10. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 10.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

11. **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 11.1 There are no equalities issues directly arising from this report. Undoubtedly, issues will emerge through the detailed work programmes to be developed, and these will be identified and managed through the proposed governance arrangements.

12. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 12.1 Initially, this programme will utilise existing Council resources from a range of service areas, although if necessary, approval may be sought to augment these in the future if deemed appropriate. Individual work strands (eg Market, CCTV) will involve specific resource requirements to be identified, with approval for resourcing to be sought as plans are developed and brought forward for approval. The Council has established, as part of its 2019-20 budget a Growth Fund which may be used to fund some elements of the programme, subject to appropriate approval. In addition, funding will be sought from other sources, such as the Future High Streets Fund, to which a bid has been submitted.

13. **Major Risks**

It has been recognised that the town centre is at a tipping point, and the key risk to the town would be the Council taking no action at this time to address the challenges faced. Risk assessments will be required to be developed within the two work streams and reported to the Leadership Group.

14. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

14.1 None directly arising from this report.

15. **Key Decision Information**

15.1 This is a key decision, likely to involve significant expenditure over time.

16. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

N/A

17. **List of Appendices**

None

19. **Background Papers**

The Council Plan