

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**REPORT TO THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ENTERPRISE SCRUTINY PANEL**

Date: 21ST June 2012

1. HEADING: Town Centre Partnership issues and the Portas Pilot application

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Portfolio: Regeneration, Planning & Town Centres Development

Ward(s) affected: Primarily the Town Centre

Purpose of the Report

To update the Scrutiny Panel on progress with the setting up of a town centre partnership for Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre and to inform them of the outcome of the recent application to become a Portas pilot town and plans to resubmit for the second round.

Recommendations

- a) That members agree with the recommendations for the setting up of the town centre partnership outlined in the 'Discussion Paper 3' circulated with the agenda
- b) That members receive the information about the original Portas pilot application and agree to its resubmission for the second round.

Reasons

Agreeing to the recommendations outlined in Discussion Paper 3 will result in the setting up of a town centre partnership fully supported by town centre businesses by the end of July 2012 and the delivery of a supporting website.

Having conducted a review of the successful first round applications, the town centre partnership feels that, to stand a better chance of success in the second round, the original application could do with tightening up. In particular this would include being more specific about how the money would be spent, what match funding would be available and production of a new Youtube video sequence.

1. Background

- 1.1. The formalisation of a Newcastle Town Centre Partnership (TCP) is a clear objective of the Council's Corporate Plan and Transformation Programme. In March 2012, Cabinet agreed to the council becoming a director of the Newcastle town centre partnership company and authorised officers to take the necessary steps to facilitate the same.
- 1.2. A TCP pre-board was set up in 2011 comprising 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. This group concentrated on a number of project areas which it felt were significant to the future improvement of the town centre's fortunes.

- 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.
- 1.3. Recent changes in representatives of some organisations has led to a re-energisation of the group. Carl Evans, local businessperson and current president of the Chamber, has produced a discussion paper based on internet research, discussions with other town centre partnerships, notably Stafford town centre, and local businesses. This paper outlines what he feels are the key factors in the success of a town centre partnership and how this might look for Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre.
- 1.4. In Dec 2011, Mary Portas issued her independent review into the future of our high streets. Following the review, the Government announced a number of national initiatives, including an invitation to set up a 'town team' and apply to become a Portas pilot town. Up to £1.2m was available to support 12 pilot schemes to test the ideas in the Portas Review with the main objective being to strengthen the high street (town centre).
- 1.5. Along with 370 other towns, Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre submitted an application which included a YouTube sequence made by a local college student and letters of support from a wide variety of businesses and organisations by the March deadline. Newcastle was not one of the lucky ones in the first round – a list of the 12 successful applications was circulated with the agenda.
- 1.6. Based on the overwhelming enthusiasm and the quality of the applications, the government has agreed to fund another 12 pilots. All those unsuccessful in the first round are automatically included in the second round, unless they choose to withdraw or resubmit. The TCP considers that it would be worth re-submitting the Newcastle application based on lessons learned from the successful bids and producing a new YouTube sequence to better represent the issues in the town centre and how we plan to resolve them.

2. Issues

- 2.1. The TCP has reached a point where, if it is to really add value to the future health of Newcastle-under-Lyme, it needs to bring together all stakeholders in the town centre by widening its membership. The attached discussion paper outlines proposals which have ramifications for the Council in terms of resource deployment and changes in the way in which town centre businesses and council officers and members will work together in the future. It is vital that officers and members understand these ramifications and decide what and how they can support the TCP before it begins to recruit members.
- 2.2. Of the 12 successful towns in the first round of Portas pilot applications, all bar one had high vacancy rates, either generally or in the area of the town on which the application was focussed. Of those studied in more detail there was a very clear focus on what needs to be done to address the issues identified, what funding was required and where the funding would come from, including match funding, both in-kind and monetary. Clear support from businesses and other partners was also well demonstrated. Whilst the original Newcastle application contained all the relevant information it was felt that certain sections were not specific enough, particularly those relating to the financials and how the proposed projects would really address the identified issues. A partial rewrite is proposed, and input is sought from stakeholders into the projects we should be proposing to test out the Portas recommendations whilst addressing the needs of the town centre.

3. Options Considered

- 3.1. Should the Council not get involved in the setting up of a TCP –
 - 3.1.1. The partnership may go ahead without Council involvement which will perpetuate an 'us and them' culture (not recommended).
 - 3.1.2. The TCP will not be set up leading to a continued and more rapid decline of the town centre (not recommended).
- 3.2. Not re-submitting the Portas pilot bid – without making some changes it is highly unlikely our application would be considered for the second round (although even with changes there is no guarantee of success as we are still in competition with over 350 other towns across the country for 12 grants (not recommended).

4. Proposal

- 4.1. That the Council becomes involved with the TCP and members agree to the recommendations for the setting up of the TCP outlined in the 'Discussion Paper 3' circulated with the agenda
 - 4.1.1. The partnership could be set up following an open meeting with town centre stakeholders on 30th July 2012
 - 4.1.2. The town centre website could also be delivered by end of July
- 4.2. That members receive the information about the original Portas pilot application and agree to its resubmission for the second round.
 - 4.2.1. The deadline for resubmission is 30th June 2012.

5. Reasons for Preferred Solution

- 5.1. Agreeing to the recommendations outlined in Discussion Paper 3 will result in the setting up of a town centre partnership fully supported by town centre businesses by the end of July 2012 and the delivery of a supporting website.
- 5.2. Having conducted a review of the successful first round applications, the town centre partnership feels that, to stand a better chance of success in the second round, the original application could do with tightening up. In particular this would include being more specific about how the money would be spent, what match funding would be available and production of a new Youtube video sequence.

6. Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities

- 6.1. 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.

7. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 7.1. There is no statutory requirement to carry out these recommendations.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

- 8.1. 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.

9. Financial and Resource Implications

- 9.1. TCP set up
 - 9.1.1. Human and financial resource implications are still being looked into.

- 9.2. Portas pilot bid
 - 9.2.1. Potential to bring in up to £100,000 funding for town centre projects.
 - 9.2.2. Officer time required to produce bid, but in-kind support from partners.
 - 9.2.3. 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.

10. **Major Risks**

- 10.1. Town centre partnership – this limits rather than increases risk. Possible reputational risk if TCP fails but potential benefits outweighs the small risk.
- 10.2. Portas Pilot bid resubmission – raising expectations if bid unsuccessful. By including the TCP in the development of the bid, expectations can be managed. Not re-submitting a bid would be far more harmful to the perception of the council by partners.

11. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

- 11.1. Mar 2012 - 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.
- 11.2. Mar 2012 - 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.

12. **Recommendations**

- 12.1. That members agree with the recommendations for the setting up of the town centre partnership outlined in the ‘Discussion Paper 3’ circulated with the agenda
- 12.2. That members receive the information about the original Portas pilot application and agree to its resubmission for the second round.

13. **Background Papers**

- 13.1. Town Centre Partnership Discussion paper 3
- 13.2. Portas Pilot – original application.
- 13.3. List of successful first round application to become Portas pilot towns.