



Regeneration and Enterprise Scrutiny Committee

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Open Report

Briefing Paper of: Steve Singleton
(Economic Development & Tourism
Manager)

Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership and Town Centre Manager - Update

1. Purpose of Briefing Paper

- 1.1 To provide an update of the work of the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership and Town Centre Manager.

2. Background to the Briefing Paper

- 2.1 At its meeting on 25th June 2008 Members received a briefing paper and presentation regarding the on-going work programme for regeneration and economic prosperity across the District.
- 2.2 The briefing paper included a reference to the Council's support of the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership (KTCP) and of the newly appointed Kidderminster Town Centre Manager (TCM), who reports to the Head of Planning, Health and Environment through the Regeneration & Economic Prosperity Section.
- 2.3 Appended to the briefing paper was the draft Wyre Forest District Economic Regeneration Work Programme 2008 - 2014. This Work Programme includes a section highlighting a number of priorities that are being worked on by the Town Centre Partnership and the Town Centre Manager.
- 2.4 At the meeting, it was agreed that the Committee receive a follow up briefing, specifically on Kidderminster Town Centre Management issues.

3. Background to the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership and Town Centre Manager

- 3.1 Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership (KTCP) was established in 1993 to bring together organisations with an interest in the vitality and future of the management of Kidderminster town centre. It provides a body which can bring together the numerous public, private and voluntary sector organisations that can influence decisions and make things happen.

- 3.2 Kidderminster itself is recognised in the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy as one of only 25 'Strategic Centres' in the region and serves the needs of a significant catchment area.
- 3.3 It has been a long term desire for KTCP to have a Town Centre Manager in post to provide a dedicated resource to assist in the development and implementation of such activity. This would bring Kidderminster in line with many of the other 25 'Strategic Centres' in the region.

The Role of a Town Centre Manager

- 3.4 Since the inception of the KTCP, the Town Centre Management movement has rapidly developed. The Association of Town Centre Management advocates good practice and professionalism for the many Town Centre Managers who are now employed throughout the UK.
- 3.5 Commonly, Town Centre Managers work in partnership with local businesses to identify and support their needs with service providers. They are also responsible for raising funding and working towards greater levels self sufficiency. Ultimately, Town Centre Managers work to maintain and improve the quality and viability for all users by acting as a co-ordinator and catalyst through encouraging co-operation between stakeholders.

The Appointment of a Town Centre Manager for Kidderminster

- 3.6 In 2006, KTCP adopted a Plan to establish and fund a Town Centre Manager. The same Plan was endorsed and supported by the Cabinet at its meeting on 16th February 2006.
- 3.7 Subject to securing private sector match funding, to create a sound basis for launching the proposed Manager post, the Council agreed to provide funding during 2007/08 and 2008/09 to help resource the position.
- 3.8 Whilst progress was made in formulating a wider business plan and the restructuring of the Partnership, stakeholders were not able to generate and commit to the sums required to fund the post.
- 3.9 However, in 2007 Henderson Global Investors, the new owners of Weavers Wharf, announced plans to appoint a part time Centre Manager for the Weavers Wharf complex. Given that such a manager needed to possess similar skills and attributes expected of a town centre manager, agreement was reached with Henderson for a 50:50 joint funded post which for 2.5 days would be based in the Council's Planning, Health and Environment Division and would work on wider town centre proposals in conjunction with the Town Centre Partnership.
- 3.10 Subsequently, at its meeting on 26th July 2007, the Cabinet approved to fund 50% of the salary for the post for a 3 year period subject to a Service Level Agreement setting out the operation of the post between the two partners. In 2008/09, the budget cost of the post is being met from existing budgets and in 2009/10 and 2010/11, the cost will be included in the Council's Base Budget and be met from the Council's LABGI Grant.

- 3.11 Following a joint recruitment process, Jackie Roberts was appointed to the position in March 2008 on a 3 year, 37 hour dual contract role. Jackie is employed by Savills Management Resources (commercial agents of Henderson Global Investors) to run the Weavers Wharf Shopping Centre and then seconded back to Wyre Forest District Council for 50% of the working week, to complete Town Centre Management duties with the support of the KTCP. A suite of offices has been provided by Savills Management Resources.
- 3.12 The appointment of Jackie Roberts and the restructuring of the Town Centre Partnership add additional capacity in support of the District Council's overall ambitions to regenerate Kidderminster. It will complement other partnerships established elsewhere in the town including Oldington & Foley Park Neighbourhood Pathfinder and the Horsefair, Broadwaters and Greenhill Partnership.
- 3.13 There are a number of major opportunities emerging within and around the town centre. A rejuvenated Town Centre Partnership can have a key role to play in delivering the vision, aims and objectives that are expected to emerge in the Kidderminster Regeneration Prospectus, the Local Development Framework and ultimately a new Town Centre Strategy. This will provide added confidence to public and private sector investors.
- 3.14 This joint venture approach represented Kidderminster's only opportunity to deliver its long term ambition for a TCM in a reasonable timeframe.

4. KTCP Business Plan and Town Centre Manager Objectives

- 4.1 KTCP adopted a 3 year Business Plan in April 2007 that provided a new Corporate Management Structure for KTCP including Working Groups to cover:-
- Community Safety
 - Business Development
 - Quality Environment
 - Events
- 4.2 Following the appointment of the TCM, it is appropriate that the 2007 Business Plan is updated. Ultimately it is envisaged this process may lead to the development of a wider Town Centre Strategy that pulls together:-
- i) the 2007 Business Plan's aims and objectives,
 - ii) the TCM's current Business Objectives,
 - iii) the physical regeneration opportunities being developed through the Kidderminster Regeneration Prospectus and
 - iv) the Local Development Framework Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan

- 4.3 In the interim however, it is proposed to develop a “Town Centre Partnership Management Plan 2008 – 2011” that merges the KTCP’s 2007 Business Plan’s aims and objectives with the TCM’s current Business Objectives.
- 4.4 A copy of the 2007 Business Plan and the current draft Town Centre Partnership Management Plan 2008 - 2011 are set out in Appendices A & B respectively. The draft Management Plan is very much a work in progress but does usefully identify:-
- The current structure of KTCP
 - The Strategic Aims of KTCP
 - The Priorities of the Town Centre Manager for 2008/09
 - Actions for both the Working Groups and for the Kidderminster Town Centre Manager.

5. Work of the TCM & KTCP

5.1 The key responsibilities of the TCM are to: -

- coordinate the management, marketing, events activities and operation of the town centre to the very highest professional standard
- development of strong relationships with the town centre businesses and KTCP
- adhere to all key performance indicators as set out in the agreement between the District Council and Henderson Global Investors
- be the face of the Town and wider Partnership.
- Develop and grow Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership’s membership base and activities

5.2 Since appointment the TCM has:-

- developed links with local businesses
- completed an audit of empty shops
- negotiated on the deal to fill the former Marks & Spencer unit on High St
- arranged an Agents meeting with members of the Regeneration & Economic Prosperity team
- produced and delivered business packs including a Business Questionnaire to all business within the town centre (see Appendices C & D)
- arranged a KTCP corporate rebranding project with Kidderminster College
- is developing the Town Centre Website
- sourcing sustainable income streams
- is currently arranging at KTCP relaunch event to encourage new members to join

5.3 KTCP Working Groups are currently focusing on continued development of Community Safety, Improvement of the Public Environment, a Harvest event in September 2008 and Christmas 2008 shopping/lights switch on events.

6. Tackling key issues including Empty Shops

6.1 In addition to the work programmes highlighted in Appendices A & B, the TCM and Regeneration team at the District Council are currently developing an Empty Shops Strategy to encourage businesses to take up vacant units with a particular focus on the older parts of town around Worcester Street, Blackwell St and Coventry St.

6.2 As part of this issue, Members are reminded that at its meeting on 9th January 2008, the former Community & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee received a Briefing Paper regarding vacant retail premises in Kidderminster Town Centre.

6.2.1 Members noted that the overall unit vacancy rate since November 2006, had remained relatively stable (From 8.86% to 8.14%) and the percentage of floorspace vacant (9.29%) has decreased from 10.76%. It was also noted that both of these vacancy figures were below their respective national averages and on the whole, it was considered that Kidderminster had a relatively healthy centre in terms of vacancy rates. (This is still considered to be the case).

6.2.2 Members also noted that a number of initiatives were taking place aimed to improve the profile of the town :-

- The scope to reinvigorate the Worcester Street axis will be greatly influenced by the Council's proposals for KTC.3, the Local Development Framework's Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan and the emerging Kidderminster Prospectus. This is likely to involve the preparation of a new Town Centre Strategy to underpin the plan.
- The restructured Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership and the proposed Town Centre Manager would enable a more strategic and targeted approach to take place regarding the marketing and promotion of the town centre as a shopping and visitor destination.
- The Town Centre Partnership was to lead on the development of a Web site for the town centre, to provide information on shops, businesses, events and opportunities in the town.
- In terms of maintaining activity in the "traditional" town centre the District Council's outdoor market had been expanded from one, to two days per week and the number of stalls was increased to enable to market to locate in most of the pedestrianised area of Worcester St as well as in Vicar St and High St.

- The removal of the current 50% National Non Domestic Rate relief (after the first 3 months void period) on empty commercial property, from April 2008, would mean that, after the first 3 months of non occupancy, the owners of vacant units will be liable to pay the full annual Rates bill. The aim of this was to encourage owners of vacant units to seek more competitive ways of ensuring their property is occupied, eg by reducing asking rents, offering more competitive lease terms, so that the occupier, rather than the owner pay the Rates.
- Officers were to arrange meetings with representatives of the owners of units in the Worcester St area to discuss the Council's and their own issues and concerns. This would ensure the owners are aware of both the Council's concerns and of its more strategic proposals for the town. In addition it would enable the owners to raise their concerns with the Council. It is anticipated that the net result could be a focussed plan, designed specifically for Worcester Street, aimed at making it more vibrant in the future.

6.2.3 The Paper concluded that whilst Weavers Wharf and Crossley Retail Park have provided a step change in the retail offer of the town, it was clear that some areas of the traditional town centre are struggling.

6.2.4 This highlighted the need for further regeneration work including proposals to redevelop and reinvigorate those parts of the centre where vitality and viability is on the decline.

6.2.5 This may involve redefining the role of certain areas whilst strengthening the argument in favour of introducing more robust town centre management practices.

6.3 The Empty Shops Strategy is backed up with £20,000 funding from the District Council. Any strategy to get shops units back into use will have to involve close working with property owners and agents with a view to connecting prospective businesses and retailers with available premises.

6.4 A good example of this is the recent announcement that Pavers/ Leading Labels, who currently occupy the anchor Slingfield Mill property at Weavers Wharf, are about to relocate to the former Marks and Spencers building in High Street. It is understood that the premises are being modified ready for a move in August. This all follows planning permission being granted for a new Debenhams store in Slingfield Mill.

6.5 Other proposals being considered for the Empty Shops Strategy will include discussions with the owners of the former Littlewoods store and advertorials promoting the existing businesses in the key shopping streets. Marketing advice is currently being sought to develop an effective campaign to promote the District (including Kidderminster Town Centre) as a business location. Additional physical improvements may be considered including improved signage and street improvements.

7. Options for the Committee

- 7.1 That the contents of this Briefing Paper be noted;
- 7.2 The Committee may wish to comment on the draft Management Plan and emerging Empty Shops Strategy;
- 7.3 The Committee may wish to support the emerging proposals for the Empty Shops Strategy and recommend the overall approach to Cabinet.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The practice of Town Centre Management in Kidderminster is moving forward to more closely follow schemes elsewhere within the region and the rest of the country as advocated by the Association of Town Centre Management. This is a crucial development for Kidderminster, which is recognised as one of just 25 'Strategic Centres' across the West Midlands. It will also provide additional capacity and confidence to deliver ambitious regeneration plans.
- 8.2 The appointment of a Town Centre Manager through a public/private partnership has presented a unique opportunity for Kidderminster to have a dedicated manager to undertake the day to day tasks of co-ordinating the work of KTCP in the pursuit of more effective town centre management.
- 8.3 A number of important schemes are now being developed with the direct assistance of the Town Centre Manager. These include a new strategy to tackle the issue of empty shops particularly in the older parts of Kidderminster Town Centre.

9 Background Papers

- Kidderminster Economic Development & Regeneration Strategy, 2005
- Connecting Kidderminster: A Prospectus for Regenerating Kidderminster – Scoping Paper January 2008.

10 Consultees

- Head of Legal and Democratic Services

11 Appendices

A - Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership Business Plan 2007 - 2010

B - Kidderminster Town Centre Management Plan Draft (2008 - 2011)

C - Business Questionnaire

D - Covering Letter

Officer Contact Details:

Steve Singleton
Economic Development & Tourism Manager – Ext. 2168
steve.singleton@wyreforestdc.gov.uk