

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET
19TH JANUARY 2010

**Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy
– Issues and Options Document**

OPEN	
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	Multi theme
CORPORATE PLAN AIM:	Multi aim
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Stephen Clee
DIRECTOR:	Director of Planning and Regulatory Services.
CONTACT OFFICER:	Ken Harrison – Ext 2557 Ken.harrison@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES:	Appendix 1 – Kidderminster Town Centre Audit. Appendix 2 – Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy Issues & Options Paper. The appendices to this report have been circulated electronically and a public inspection copy is available on request. (See front cover for details).

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 For Cabinet to agree the Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy Issues and Options Document as the basis for consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to DECIDE that:

- 2.1 **The Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy Issues and Options Paper set out in Appendix 2 of this report, be agreed as the basis for consultation with key stakeholders.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The District Council is currently funding the Kidderminster Town Centre Manager position for 18.5 hours per week for a fixed term of three years from March 2008-2011. One of the primary objectives of the post is to deliver the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership Business Plan of April 2007 which covers the period 2007-2010. As we approach the end of the Business Plan period it is timely to review progress and consider future options towards delivering a sustainable town centre management regime for Kidderminster.

- 3.2 The Business Plan of April 2007 sets out the following vision:

“To play a leading role in the development of Kidderminster as a regional retailing and business centre, through a partnership approach with the Council and other key stakeholder interests.”

- 3.3 The Plan explains that the “Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership brings together the people with an interest in the vitality and future of the town. Established in 1993 the group was formed to provide a focus group to address town centre issues and develop a co-ordinated and comprehensive response to challenges facing the town and its development.”
- 3.4 With the Town Centre Manager having been in post for about 18 months and in line with the Planning and Regulatory Services Business Plan a Town Centre Audit has been undertaken to explore the issues facing the town centre and the partnership and a Town Centre Strategy to address the issues and realise the opportunities.
- 3.5 During the last 12 months a number of events have sought to reinvigorate the Town Centre Partnership and extend the membership of the group with limited success. At the same time the ReWyre regeneration initiative has been launched with the support of key regional agencies, Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council. This considers transport, jobs, housing and environmental quality across the town.
- 3.6 The ReWyre Initiative places a significant focus on the regeneration of sites and transport improvements within and around the town centre. In line with a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the lead agencies it is envisaged that a separate body will be established in early 2010. The effective management of the town centre will have a key role to play in delivering that wider regeneration agenda and it will be essential that the initiatives are appropriately linked together.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The vitality and viability of Kidderminster town centre appears to benefit from the proximity of three major supermarkets with associated linked trips. The Development of Weavers Wharf, Crossley Retail Park and B&Q at the turn of the millennium introduced a new dimension to shopping in the town and enabled the town to claw back trade that was being lost to competing centre and in particular Merry Hill. Despite this, Kidderminster is facing many challenges including the gravitation of vitality westwards away from Worcester Street where there has been a growing empty shops issue. Large areas of the town centre are underutilised and consist of poor quality public realm. In addition, there are fragmentation and accessibility challenges.
- 4.2 Many of the physical development and transport issues will be brought forward through the regeneration programmes and development teams. However the co-ordination of associated services including streetscene, signage, public conveniences, car parking, parks and green spaces, markets, licensing, arts, events, community safety, highways and transportation are integral to success. Many of these services are provided by local authorities and West Mercia Constabulary and whilst these bodies are represented on the Town Centre Partnership involvement is relatively low level and sporadic. Experience from elsewhere suggests that the

effective co-ordination of service and the interest and support of all businesses (big and small) requires the highest level leadership and buy-in to the regeneration and town centre management initiatives.

- 4.3 In October 2008 the Department for Communities and Local Government published a practitioners guide to managing town centre partnerships. Amongst other important issues of governance and funding that will be considered in the preparation of any strategy, the guide includes a specific chapter on strategy and performance management. This provides good practice guidance on how to:
- Build an evidence base to inform the development of a town centre strategy (the context for the development of your strategy)
 - Define a vision and a strategy for your town centre (where your town centre wants to be)
 - Identify initiatives and actions to achieve your strategy (how are we going to get there)
 - Develop measures to track the achievement of your strategy (what have we achieved)
 - Build strategic linkages in your partnership landscape and develop your partnership's strategic role.
- 4.4 The Town Centre Audit set out at Appendix 1 provides the evidence base and the Issues and Options Paper at Appendix 2 sets out an approach to developing a Strategy.
- 4.5 Despite having a town centre partnership since 1993, Kidderminster is not yet in a position to embrace the latest thinking such as the recent decision by traders in the City of Worcester voted to approve Business Improvement District (BID) status which means the shopkeepers will be levied with an additional charge on their business rates to support town centre management in the city. This requires town centre management services to be embedded within the town and the associated infrastructure to be in place. As the Audit at Appendix 2 illustrates, with a part-time town centre manager and limited support from volunteers and businesses, Kidderminster town centre is not ready to make that step.
- 4.6 It is envisaged that the Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy will set out an approach towards creating a more effective town centre management (TCM) regime for the town. It will link TCM with the ReWyre Initiative; the emerging Local Development Framework (including Kidderminster Central Area Action Plan Development Plan Document); and the Wyre Forest Matters Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 4.7 A number of options are set out in the issues and options document including one to link the decision making infrastructure for town centre management to the proposed Board that will guide the ReWyre Initiative. That Board will consist of the most senior level representation from the local authorities, regional agencies and business.
- 4.8 The issues and options will be tested through consultation with key stakeholders including the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership itself and consultees will be invited to make additional suggestions. Consultation feedback will be reported to the Community and Regeneration Committee and Cabinet as part of the adoption of the

Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy in the summer of 2010. This will form a key part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework and will help to shape the future of co-ordinated service provision and ultimately the role of the Town Centre Manager.

- 4.9 The Issues and Options Paper was considered at the Community & Regeneration Committee on the 7th January 2010.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The costs of developing the Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy can be met from within existing budgets. Ultimately the strategy will look to develop a sustainable position for Town Centre Management and the associated manager position by seeking to lever additional funding support from businesses and external sources.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report. The recommended policy responses are in accordance with the Council's established priorities.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment Screening has been undertaken for the Town Centre Strategy. This identified that the Town Centre Strategy has no discernable impacts on the six equality strands.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 The risks of not developing a strategy are that the current town centre management regime fails to progressively develop and build the necessary momentum for a sustainable future. However, the audit and strategy will seek to challenge the existing position and this may have direct and/or indirect implications for the existing Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The development of a Town Centre Strategy for Kidderminster will help to provide a high level co-ordinated response to the opportunities and challenges currently facing the town centre.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 None.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership Business Plan 2007-2010

Managing Town Centre Partnerships: A Practitioners Guide, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008

12. NEXT STEPS

- 12.1 Consultation will be undertaken February to April and the findings will be reported to the Community and Regeneration Committee and Cabinet in early summer.