

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
21ST SEPTEMBER 2010

Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy – Consultation Feedback

OPEN	
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME:	Shared Prosperity
CORPORATE PLAN AIM:	Promoting Economic Prosperity
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor S J M Clee
DIRECTOR:	Director of Planning & Regulatory Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Ken Harrison - Ext 2557 ken.harrison@wyreforestdc.gov.uk
APPENDICES:	Appendix A – Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy Consultation Material Appendix B – Consultation feedback summary of responses Appendix C – Residents’ Survey <i>The appendices to this report have been circulated electronically and a public inspection copy is available on request. (See front cover for details.)</i>

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 For Cabinet to agree the next steps on the development of the Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy and to note consultation feedback as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to **DECIDE** that:

- 2.1 The next steps set out at Paragraph 4.15 and 4.16 of this report be approved including match funding towards the Town Centre Enhancement project set out at Paragraph 4.15 and that the delegated authority be given to the Director of Planning & Regulatory Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration to agree and implement proposals to enhance Kidderminster Town Centre;

and

- 2.2 Delegated authority be given to the Director of Planning & Regulatory Services to make the necessary amendments to the Town Centre Strategy and necessary arrangements to review the Town Centre Partnership.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In January this year Members of this Committee endorsed a report setting out an Audit of Kidderminster Town Centre and a proposed consultation on a Town Centre Strategy for town. The Audit identified a number of particular challenges from the structure, membership, funding and operation of the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership itself to more detailed issues such as environmental quality.
- 3.2 The purpose of the strategy can be summarised as follows:
- Identify the complex challenges and opportunities;
 - Help establish a credible and influential partnership body;
 - Provide a guide, prompt and control mechanism for the town and partnership;
 - Help the partnership to focus efforts, deliver enhanced results and develop trust;
 - Clarify partner contributions and benefits, provide a statement of co-operation and future achievements that all stakeholders want to be associated with;
 - Represent 'a vision for change' and a source of stories for the media; and
 - Provide residents and businesses with opportunities to get involved and with information confirming what is planned and ultimately delivered within their town.
- 3.3 A consultation exercise was subsequently undertaken with businesses and residents within the town centre with the aid of a summary leaflet and questionnaire which are provide at Appendix 1. The feedback is set out at Appendix 2. Over 300 businesses were contacted and 51 responded to the consultation.
- 3.4 **Recommendations from Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee – 15th July 2010:**

At its meeting on 15th July 2010, the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee considered a report from the Policy and Regeneration Manager that sought Members' views on the Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy consultation feedback.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET that the proposals as at paragraphs 4.15 and 4.16 be adopted.

4. **KEY ISSUES**

Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership

- 4.1 The over-riding objective for the development of the Town Centre Strategy is the evolution of the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership which was found to be ineffective as part of the Town Centre Audit. There is a broad consensus that the Partnership should ideally be Chaired by a business leader from the Town Centre who can provide business thinking to the organisation which should also become much more representative of the town centre community and be operated on more of a business model.
- 4.2 Town Centre Partnerships are in place throughout the UK either as informal or more formal partnership organisations depending on their relative maturity. Although Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership has been around since the mid 1990's it has failed to develop into a more formal partnership. Elsewhere Partnerships tend to be

business focussed but bring together various stakeholders and delivery partners that help to ensure a clean, green, safe and attractive environment for shopping and business. Increasingly these Partnerships are being supported by business community through the establishment of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), as recently established in Worcester

http://www.visitworcester.com/business_improvement_district.asp

- 4.3 As a general rule the establishment of a BID is a landmark in the evolution of Town Centre Partnership working and indicates an advanced stage of formality and belief in the Partnership.
- 4.4 When asked whether they considered there to be a sense of community within the town centre 78% of the business respondents said no and 22% believe that more interaction is required in order to foster a greater sense of community. The majority (38 of 51) of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (9) with life in the town centre. However, most (30) respondents are happy to be located in the town centre. Only 8 respondents indicated that they felt they belonged to the immediate town centre community whilst 17 indicated that they did not feel part of the town centre community. This feedback further brings into question the effectiveness of the current partnership arrangements as there is clearly a lack of togetherness.
- 4.5 During the course of the consultation Kidderminster's first Fashion Show was co-ordinated by the Town Centre Manager and attracted an audience of 120 people to the Town Hall and raised over £700 for Kemp Hospice. The event brought a number of the major fashion chains together including Debenhams, Tesco, Bon Marche, Peacocks, Edinburgh Woollen Mill and Boots along with their respective store managers. Officers are currently in discussions to see whether the participants are willing to take on a more active role in the Partnership.
- 4.6 During the consultation process West Mercia Constabulary suggested the possibility of establishing a separate town centre PACT. However, given that the town already has Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership and KRISP it was agreed that a one Partnership approach is preferred in order to prevent inefficient duplication of effort amongst partners.
- 4.7 A further dimension that could influence the review of Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership is an expression of interest from Hereford and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce who are interested in helping to establish a more effective partnership in the town. Officers are in discussions with the Chamber to understand their possible role.
- 4.8 Through the above processes it is envisaged that a number of 'Champions for Change' will join the Partnership to provide the necessary challenge and business thinking to take things forward and help to reinvent the existing Partnership.

Town Centre Business Environment

- 4.9 Of those businesses responding, 30 of the 51 said they were happy to be located in the town centre. However, significant 10 businesses indicated that they would like to move out of the town centre. The top two benefits of being located in the centre were highlighted as proximity to other shops and compactness of the centre. The 3 worst things about the town centre included empty shops, anti-social behaviour and parking although it is unclear whether this is long stay car parking or shop workers or

customers. Interesting only 3 people highlight the attractiveness of the centre as a strength, whilst 10 considered this to be a weakness. As part of the survey businesses were asked to score issues of concern from 1 (not concerned) to 5 (very concerned) and anti-social behaviour, parking, crime, litter and traffic all scored more than 3 i.e. of some concern to businesses.

- 4.10 Turning to possible solutions and the top 3 suggestions for improving life in the town centre were improving parking, tackling anti-social behaviour and policing and making the town centre more attractive. 72% of business respondents agreed that more green space and trees would make the town centre a more attractive environment. Other suggestions that featured highly include initiative to improve the variety of shops, filling empty shops, providing entertainment and events, which also links to marketing and promotion. Tackling traffic congestion was mentioned by 3 businesses. In terms of services provided within the town centre, the main gaps highlighted by businesses were evening entertainment and parks and green spaces. In terms of improving the evening leisure market 38 of the 51 business respondents suggested destination leisure facilities such as cinema and bowling facilities followed by additional restaurants (20) and bars and clubs (11).
- 4.11 When asked what they think should be the Council's top 3 priorities, the two most popular answers were getting more businesses into the town and improving the variety of shops both of which are roles for Economic Development and regeneration working with developers and landowners. Improving transport and parking which is a role for planning and car parks teams, along with reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and the creation of a clean and attractive town centre. 6% of respondents suggested the provision of high quality cultural and leisure activities. In looking at what could make the town safer the businesses agreed that introducing more residents and visitors would help although a slight preference for mechanical techniques i.e. lighting and CCTV. Despite additional residents being seen as a means of improving security, only 25% of business respondents agreed with the idea of building more houses in the town centre and 12 respondents suggested Worcester Street/ Bromsgrove Street. However, 50% of respondents disagreed with the principle of additional residential development in the town centre.
- 4.12 In terms of priorities for wholesale regeneration the businesses clearly favoured the development of Worcester Street and Bromsgrove Street with an average score of 4.7 out of 5 in importance. This links into the Eastern Gateway concept emerging in the ReWyre Initiative. 53% of the businesses agreed that the development of the areas alongside the canal would help.
- 4.13 Of the suggested actions that need to be considered in the Town Centre Strategy a number may be delivered through effective Town Centre Management and the work of the Partnership. These are likely to include tackling anti-social behaviour, making the town centre more attractive, improving car parking and providing entertainment and events. Other suggestions such as improving the variety of shops, filling empty shops and tackling traffic congestion may be more effectively addressed through the regeneration and development process. Some will need urban design input including enhancing town centre attraction to ensure streets and spaces are well designed and connected. However, the benefit of a partnership approach is to be found in co-ordination and bringing together the various delivery bodies including WCC Transport and Highways, various teams within WFDC and West Mercia Constabulary.

Town Centre Residential Environment

- 4.14 The findings of a residents' survey are also provided at Appendix C.

Next Steps

- 4.15 The survey findings and suggestions will need to be incorporated into a revised Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy document and this will be tabled to the Town Centre Partnership on 5th October 2010. It will be important to demonstrate early action and delivery to a reinvigorated Town Centre Partnership. It is proposed that a Kidderminster Town Centre Enhancement Project is advanced utilising a grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government and to include match funding from the District Council. This project will make a real difference to the town centre environment and start to tackle the issues highlighted in the consultation feedback and original audit. This will be a key project under the ReWyre initiative and will continue to deliver against the Council's 'District-Wide Regeneration' Corporate priority.
- 4.16 Discussions will continue with business leaders and retail managers in addition to the Hereford and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce and West Mercia Constabulary. An extraordinary meeting of the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership will be called in September to present the findings and look to restart the organisation and its operating structure.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The costs of implementing the Empty Shops Strategy and Town Centre Partnership review can be met from existing budgets.
- 5.2 The proposed Kidderminster Town Centre Enhancement Project will be met from existing budgets including s.106 contributions secured towards public art as part of Weavers Wharf developments (KTC.1) together with grant funding and the ReWyre Initiative and unallocated reserves.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal or policy implications arising from this report.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Equality & Diversity Screening Assessment has already been carried out and did not highlight any adverse implications.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising for the Council from this report. Reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that the resulting review of the Town Centre Partnership is amicable and developed by consensus.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 It is envisaged that the findings of the consultation feedback set out at Appendix 2 and the resulting next steps set out in Paragraphs 4.15 and 4.16 above will be reported to the Kidderminster Town Centre Partnership in September 2010.

10. CONSULTEES

- 10.1 Kidderminster Town Centre Manager
10.2 Director of Corporate Resources

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Kidderminster Town Centre Audit
11.2 Kidderminster Town Centre Strategy Issues and Options Paper