

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 3rd April 2013
Report of: Corporate Director, Economic Growth and Prosperity

Report Title

Town Centres – Update on Activity, Achievements to Date and Future Work Programme

Summary

This report provides an update on the activities taking place in Altrincham, Sale, Stretford and Urmston town centres.

Recommendation(s)

1. To note the contents of the report.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Background Papers: *None*

Background

Trafford's main town centres – Altrincham, Sale, Stretford and Urmston – provide four unique centres which complement each other spread throughout the Borough, offering the people of Trafford a range of town centre facilities and services right on their doorstep and are a main priority and focus for the Council.

A number of organisations and Council services are responsible for different aspects of town centre provision and are crucial to whether Trafford's town centres attract shoppers, visitors, businesses and investment. Successful town centres require the active support of all town centre users – businesses, landowners, developers, voluntary organisations and residents as well as statutory organisations such as the police, transport providers, colleges and schools. Working in partnership and having a co-ordinated approach will help to deliver first class facilities, services and investment that make for vibrant, prosperous, distinctive and forward looking town centres.

1. VACANT UNITS

A number of activities are progressing that will assist in getting vacant units back into use and enhance the offer of the town centres. The main projects to achieve this are outlined below.

1.1 Town Centre Interest Free Loan Scheme

- Launched on 11th February, the purpose of the loan scheme is to get vacant units back into use in Altrincham, Sale, Stretford and Urmston town centres, to encourage long term viability and enhance the offer of the town centres. The scheme is open to Trafford businesses looking to expand into a vacant unit, businesses elsewhere wanting to locate in the town centres and entrepreneurs looking to start up a new business in the town.
- The scheme is being promoted via business support partner organisations/networks, town centre partnerships and commercial letting agents and landlords in the town centres.
- There have been 36 enquiries in the first month. Once an application has been received it will be forwarded onto an agreed panel for each town with Council and private sector representation for scoring with a decision made as soon as possible to be communicated to the applicant.

1.2 Work with Landlords and Commercial Agents

- An audit and register of vacant units in the town centres, including ownership/agent, floorspace and condition, is continually updated to assist with business enquiries for premises.
- There is continued dialogue with Altrincham landlords and letting agents to share information and enquiries so they are not lost to the town centre and this model is to be expanded to Urmston shortly. In all four town centres, there is contact with the main landlords and developers regarding their investments and progress on schemes.
- A business support information package has been developed to give to business enquiries.

1.3 Short Term Alternative Use for Vacant Units

- Short term and community uses and initiatives for vacant units are continually researched and innovative projects with partners are being developed. In Altrincham these include:

- A pop up Health and Wellbeing Unit, involving a variety of partners.
- A 'Behind the Scenes' Photographic Exhibition was organised in conjunction with Trafford College.
- Work is ongoing with the Retailers and Landlords Forum to use vacant units to showcase existing business clusters in the town and highlight to potential new businesses.
- Further possibilities are being explored with a view to expanding these projects to all the town centres, including a pop up unit with activities aimed at young people.

1.4 **Business Rates**

- Work is underway with town centre stakeholders to develop a case for a rates reduction for individual businesses and Altrincham Forward will work with businesses in the town who wish to put in these applications.
- The Leader has been lobbying Ministers regarding business rates and has written a letter stating how the delay in carrying out the rates review is adversely impacting businesses.
- Discussions with the local Valuation Office are also progressing.
- The Small Business Rates Relief scheme will be promoted on the Trafford Council, Altrincham Forward, Altrincham and Sale Chamber and the Town Centre websites.

1.5 **Improving the Appearance of Vacant Units**

- The Council has produced a schedule of properties whose appearance or condition have a detrimental impact on the amenity or appearance of the town – some are vacant and others are occupied. Landlords will be given a brief opportunity to improve the condition of the property. If the conditions are not changed, then the Council will take enforcement action. A small number of high profile and prominent buildings will be targeted initially. This will be piloted in Altrincham but will be rolled out to the other town centres and targeted at problem properties.

1.6 **Attracting Independent Businesses**

- An Attracting Independents Strategy and Action Plan will be developed. Initially this will be piloted in Altrincham but it will be rolled out to the other town centres soon after.
- An audit and mapping of existing independent businesses has taken place to identify clusters and gaps in the offer.
- Existing successful independent businesses have been enlisted to be ambassadors in Altrincham, Sale and Urmston, to offer advice and encouragement to new independents and those looking to locate in the town. Additional ambassadors will continue to be recruited for all four main towns, including Stretford.
- Established, specialist businesses in towns with a similar profile will continue to be approached regarding potential expansion plans.

2. **ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS**

As part of the Town Centres Investment Fund, which also includes the Loan Scheme, funding for Environmental Improvements has been allocated for each of the town centres.

Costed options for Sale and Urmston have been prepared for consultation during March/April 2013. Extra time was agreed to assist in drawing down additional funds.

The other schemes will be drawn up in due course: Altrincham's scheme will be implemented in line with a detailed Public Realm and Access Strategy; and Stretford's will be drawn up following the completion of a Masterplan for the town.

3. EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

3.1 Christmas Activities/Christmas Lights

Christmas events were organised in all the town centres with positive feedback received and a number of businesses reporting an upturn in trade.

In 2012, the Council worked with Sale Town Partnership and Urmston Partnership to fund the installation of Christmas trees in both town centres. There has also been positive feedback regarding the new Christmas lights arrangements in the town centres.

Through business engagement in 2012, it has become evident that some businesses are willing to contribute through sponsorship opportunities and this will be explored for this year. In many cases, it is apparent that national retailers, whilst happy to provide in kind support and prizes, are unable to provide monetary contributions as these are head office decisions.

3.2 2013 Events & Competitions

2013 Activity Programmes are being progressed in all four town centres with the involvement of partners, local groups and schools, which include competitions and events.

Urmston: Spring Fayre & Easter competition (April), Artisan Market (September), Christmas Lights Switch On Event & competition (November)

Stretford: Easter Event (April), Elf competition (November) and seasonal events

Sale: Summertime Sounds Event, offers & competition (June), Christmas Lights Switch On, offers & competition (November)

Altrincham: Altrincham Forward initiatives including a full programme of 'Alty Easter' and 'Alty Xmas' events, Taste of Trafford and Twilight Markets

3.3 Young Enterprise Students' Fair

In early February there was a successful Young Enterprise students' fair for them to test out their entrepreneurial skills at Altrincham Market and there are plans to extend this to the other town centres.

3.4 Tidy Business Awards

Trafford's Tidy Business Awards scheme is being promoted to town centre businesses to encourage their participation and provide recognition to environmentally friendly businesses.

3.5 GM Marathon

Opportunities for involvement and sponsorship for the GM Marathon, on 28th April have been highlighted to town centre businesses as well as planning for potential disruption.

4. FUNDING

4.1 Town Team Funding

Altrincham and Stretford both successfully bid for Town Team funding of £10,000. Altrincham's will go towards the establishment of a Town Team whilst Stretford's will be used to set up a Community Hub in a vacant shopping centre unit (awaiting official permission) to develop activities to promote and encourage use of Stretford town centre. The Community Hub will provide diversionary activities for young people, health and wellbeing, skills development and intergenerational work in conjunction with partners.

4.2 High Street X Fund Bid

A High Street X Fund bid was submitted for Altrincham based around the work being done by Altrincham Forward. It asks for a scheme to be nominated that links innovation to increased use of vacant units, footfall or turnover. A decision is expected in March.

4.3 Pinch Point Fund

A bid for a share of £170 million set up by the Highways Agency to reduce congestion has been submitted for Altrincham based on priority schemes in the Public Realm Strategy, such as Stamford New Road.

4.4 Additional Town Centre Funding Opportunities

The potential to develop further funding streams for town centre projects, marketing and events is being explored. This includes more effective use of the towns' display areas and external funding sources.

5. STRATEGIES AND PLANS

5.1 GM Town Centres Review

A review of the eight principal town centres for each Borough (excluding the Regional centre – Manchester and Salford) in Greater Manchester took place towards the end of last year. For Trafford, the principal town centre is Altrincham, the largest town. The GM Review report and potential opportunities for Altrincham will be discussed in detail once it is made public and proposals for GM investment will be taken forward via the GM Investment Fund. The recommendations to increase their long term viability will be shared with all Trafford's town centres.

5.2 Altrincham

Feedback on the Public Realm and Access Strategy and Market Quarter outline proposals has broadly been favourable. An Altrincham Forward Action Plan has been developed to progress projects that can have a positive impact in the town centre. An Altrincham Masterplan is to be developed.

5.3 Stretford

Work on a wide ranging Stretford Masterplan document is ongoing and is on track to be consulted on in April/ May.

5.4 Sale/Urmston

Both Sale and Urmston have implemented significant redevelopment plans in recent years and have benefited from completion of schemes that have improved the offer in the town centres and provided a catalyst for further investment. Discussions continue regarding investment opportunities (see Appendix 1).

6. MONITORING OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

6.1 Town Centre Trends

A town centre performance dashboard to monitor indicators such as vacancies, new businesses, crime and car parking has been developed. This will be incorporated into a 'Town Centre Trends' report for each town centre that will also include national statistics relating to sales, footfall and rents. They will be updated regularly and presented to the town centre partnerships and Altrincham Forward. Work is underway with New Economy to develop indicators which link into Greater Manchester and other GM towns

6.2 Business Survey

A survey for town centre businesses in each of the town centres will go out by early May. This will include questions regarding customer profile, spend, sale performance, training requirements, business issues and opportunities, suggestions for projects and improvements and will be used to inform the Town Centre Strategies and Action Plans.

7. COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR TOWN CENTRE ORGANISATIONS/WORK

7.1 Working with Town Centre Organisations

The Council works with the town centre representative organisations to:

- Develop a consistent approach for all town centre organisations, taking into account each town's individual make up, issues and resources available.
- Encourage business involvement in town centre activities and the work of the town centre organisations.
- Focus the work and energies of Trafford Council and other agencies operating in the town centres to consider and input into the long term viability of the towns.
- Assist in the development of appropriate and relevant policies and service delivery plans which improve the town centres and help their businesses.

Economic Growth provides the strategic framework for town centre activity, Partnership and policy development as well as maximising opportunities for Trafford's towns by working with major stakeholders, businesses, investors, partner organisations and agencies.

The Stronger Communities team co-ordinates the work of the town centre partnerships, undertaking town centre projects and working with service providers to resolve any operational issues.

Resolution of issues, updates on town centre initiatives and sharing of best practice is taken forward via a Town Centres Operational Group which includes the Stronger Communities and Economic Growth teams.

- ### 7.2 Altrincham Forward
- Altrincham has benefited from the involvement of key interest groups, businesses, landowners, service providers (such as the College, Leisure Trust and Transport for Greater Manchester) and community organisations. They are helping to influence positive change, assisting in overcoming barriers to development and encouraging a co-ordinated approach and active involvement in town centre projects and activities. This approach has been recognised on a GM level and through the media. It is envisaged that this model can be expanded to the other town centres.

As the largest town in Trafford, Altrincham will also have a town team established. A Town Centre Manager will be recruited to lead on its development and workplan.

7.3 Publicity & Social Media

Sale Town Partnership and Urmston Partnership launched Twitter accounts in 2012 to promote the town centres to a younger and wider audience.

The four town centre websites are updated on a regular basis with news updates, business listings, links to property search information and event details. Press releases are also issued regularly.

7.4 Town Centre Partnerships Forum

A forum is being arranged for Spring for representatives from each of the Partnerships to discuss and identify solutions for shared issues, opportunities, suggestions for improvement and national best practice.

8. BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

8.1 Business Contact

There is continued contact with town centre businesses in all four town centres to discuss opportunities for involvement in town centre projects, joint promotional work and ideas to improve and market the towns.

Town centre newsletters are delivered to all town centre businesses regularly, with updates relevant to each town centre plus general business support information and details of forthcoming projects and events.

8.2 Business Support

A town centre specific list of available business support has been prepared and is updated regularly and, for example, this is distributed to businesses who enquire through the Loan Scheme.

9. MARKETS

9.1 Altrincham Market

Proposals are being finalised regarding refurbishment of the Council owned Altrincham Market to enable greater and more flexible use of the space. This will be complemented by environmental improvements to the Market Quarter area, providing better links to the rest of the town centre and positioning Altrincham as the modern market town.

9.2 Themed and Other Markets

Themed markets have been taking place in Altrincham, including new Twilight Markets. In Sale and Urmston, smaller artisan/producer market stalls are linked to some of the main events in these town centres. These markets have helped to attract additional people into the towns.

In Stretford, one of the priority areas for the Loan scheme is the market area.

Discussions with the privately owned Urmston Market owner to assist in its promotion are ongoing but interventions are limited as the Market is privately owned.

Consultation

The following elements have been consulted on:

Section 1.1. Partnerships and Altrincham Forward Local Economy Group and Landlords Forum were consulted on the Town Centre Loan Scheme in October/November 2012.

Section 2. Sale and Urmston Town Centre Partnerships and businesses to be consulted on the Environmental Works in April 2013.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

The report provides an update on activity, achievements to date and future work for the Scrutiny Committee to consider and discuss.

APPENDIX 1

1. ALTRINCHAM DEVELOPMENTS

- **New Hospital Site** – Work has started on this site within the town centre and completion is due at the end of 2014.
- **Market Area and Existing Hospital Site** – Work will start on the existing hospital site once the new hospital has been completed. More detailed proposals are being drawn up for this big regeneration scheme and the creation of a Market Quarter. In the meantime, Market improvements will be undertaken, including: introducing more flexible space to enable greater usage; provision of a community hub in the Market area to offer a single point of access for town centre enquiries; and improvements to the public realm.
- **Altair** – The plans for this major leisure based scheme are being finalised for delivery.
- **Interchange** – Construction work is due to commence in the Spring with completion in 2014 but plans are in place to minimise disruption for commuters and businesses with a detailed communications plan to inform people.

2. SALE DEVELOPMENTS

- **Former Metro Pub Next to Sale Tram Station** – Work is complete on this mixed use development which will include 49 retirement apartments and three small retail units.

3. STRETFORD DEVELOPMENTS

- **Stretford Mall** - A planning application has been submitted by Estama for the creation of a new supermarket unit in place of the Wilkinsons unit is awaiting Section 106 agreement.
- **Edge Lane Shops (H/78555)** – A proposed development includes a conversion of some of the ground floor units from offices to residential accommodation. The upper floors are already residential.

4. URMSTON DEVELOPMENTS

- **Eden Square** – Negotiations are in final stages for the last remaining units in Phase 2 of the Eden Square development. The vacant units in Phase 1 of the Eden Square development are continuing to attract additional interest and there are plans for increased targeted marketing by Ask and their letting agents for these.
- **Former Quality Save, Station Road** – A new electrical goods outlet will be opening here now that Quality Save has moved back into Eden Square.
- **Former Jasmine, Station Road** - This large vacant bar/restaurant unit has been refurbished as a new restaurant.
- **Former Mambos, Flixton Road** – This was sold and is currently being refurbished.

5. PARTINGTON DEVELOPMENTS

- Plans are ongoing for a major redevelopment of the shopping centre area. This will include retail and housing.