

Urmston Town Centre Road Map



**Consultation Draft
Economic Growth and Strong Communities Teams**

1. Background

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Road Map is to provide a clear, overarching plan for the physical, economic and community development activities taking place in Urmston over the next 12 months. It will be used to set the priorities for the work of the Council in the town centre and to identify potential future activity.

1.2 Aims

The proposed aims for the Road Map are to:

1. Identify developments that will realise the full potential of Urmston town centre;
2. Identify how the retail, leisure and services offer in the town centre, including the evening economy, can be improved;
3. Promote Urmston as a place to live, work, shop, relax and enjoy; increasing the footfall of the town;
4. Assist existing businesses in maintaining and improving their business performance and sustainability whilst encouraging new businesses into the area;
5. Ensure Urmston town centre is a clean, safe and accessible place for residents and visitors alike;
6. Ensure the town centre fulfils its role as a vibrant social hub for the whole community.

1.3 Brief History

Urmston (including Davyhulme and Flixton) lies approximately 5 miles west of Manchester City Centre. It is surrounded by the Manchester Ship Canal to the north and west, the M60 to the east and the River Mersey to the south.

Urmston remained a small farming community until one of the first railway stations on the Manchester to Liverpool line was built at Urmston in 1873. With its fast links to the major cities of Manchester and Liverpool, Urmston became a sought after suburb for those professionals and managers working in the city. The development of Trafford Park attracted additional wealthy residents to Urmston's leafy surrounds. This transformed the town into a major conurbation within Trafford.

1.4 Defined area

The area referred to as the “town centre” within the Road Map is the area defined as Urmston town centre within the Trafford Unitary Development Plan (UDP). This is shown in Appendix 1. It is important to note that the defined town centre boundary may change slightly as a result of the work being carried out on the Local Plan: Land Allocations Plan. However the changes are not expected to affect the principles of the Road Map or projects within it.

The areas that are included in the Road Map are listed below (property numbers are shown in brackets when only part of a road is included):

Flixton Road (1 – 65)
Crofts Bank Road (1 – 24)
Primrose Avenue
Atkinson Road

Railway Road (1 – 4 & Urmston Market)
Higher Road (1 – 9)
Greenfield Avenue (1 – 12)
Stretford Road (1 – 11)

Station Road
Hilton Avenue
Gloucester Road (52 – 82)
Church Road (1 – 14)

1.5 Urmston Town Centre Partnership

The Urmston Partnership is a non-profit, self-funding organisation formed to actively engage in improving Urmston and in promoting the town as a place to visit. The Partnership was re-launched in November 2006 and focuses on promoting the existing businesses in the town, encouraging new businesses and planning events and activities to increase footfall in the town centre. The Partnership has over 66 members and involves local businesses (including major retailers and independents) developers and landowners, residents, community groups, schools, representatives from Trafford Council and other statutory organisations working together to ensure the town centre remains a vibrant area.

The Urmston Town Centre Partnership Action Plan 2012-14 sets out the following vision for the town centre:

“To achieve a prosperous and vibrant town centre offering a diverse range of activities in an attractive, clean and safe environment for the enjoyment of the local community, businesses and visitors alike”

Urmston Partnership's three overall aims for 2012-14 include:

1. To promote and raise the profile of Urmston as a place to live, shop, relax and enjoy to increase footfall in to the town centre
2. To assist existing businesses in maintaining and improving their business performance whilst encouraging new businesses in to the area
3. Ensure Urmston town centre is a clean, safe and accessible place for visitors and residents

The Partnership is a recognised representative organisation for Urmston businesses and is consulted on proposals/planning applications for the area.

Events and town centre competitions organised by the Partnership play a key role in increasing footfall to the town centre. The key events within the programme to date are the Spring Fayre (April), the Urmston Food Festival (September), Halloween Spectacular (October), the Christmas Lights Switch on Events (November) and the Christmas Market (November/December).

1.6 Locality Partnerships

In summer 2013, the Trafford Partnership established four Locality Partnerships, made up of Councillors and partners including the police, health services and council, and Community Ambassadors.

Locality Partnerships have responsibility for deciding local priorities and shaping local services. The overarching benefit of locality working is to create a collective effort to achieve the best possible outcomes for Trafford's neighbourhoods and residents. Urmston town centre is within the Urmston & Partington (West) Locality area. The wards that make up this area are: Bucklow St Martins, Flixton, Davyhulme West, Davyhulme East and Urmston.

The three key themes that the Urmston & Partington Locality Partnership is focusing on are:

1. **Childhood Obesity** – Reducing childhood obesity and encouraging healthy lifestyles
2. **Employment and Skills** – Improving skills to support residents in to employment
3. **Improving Educational Attainment** – Improving attainment in Early Years

Two projects being developed by the Urmston & Partington Locality Partnership have links with Urmston town centre:

1. Virtual Saturday Job

The idea for the Virtual Saturday Job was developed at the Trafford Partnership event in 2013. Since then, a sub group has been created to evolve the idea which involves young people supporting businesses to develop social media pages and websites; essentially matching young people's IT skills with businesses in need of support.

As well as local social enterprises, Urmston Partnership business members will be recruited to trial the idea; the first business to take part will be Thomas Carter Opticians.

2. Community Learning

A sub group has been created to look at improving community learning courses in Urmston and Partington. Within Urmston town centre, Trafford College provide community learning courses at Urmston Library. In November 2013, Trafford College used Urmston Partnership's Christmas Market to carry out an information gathering exercise in order to understand the kind of courses local residents would like to take part in.

The group is also hoping to identify a venue in the Urmston locality which could become a Community Learning hub; this could be in the town centre and Cheeky Cherubs Soft Play Centre has been put forward as a suggestion, although the Play Centre is not expected to be fully operational until mid-2014.

Locality Partnerships will evolve over time and it is envisaged that, in the long term, they may take on devolved services and will influence the resource allocation of an area. They therefore have an important role to play in determining the future of town centres alongside the Town Centre Partnerships.

2. Current Baseline

2.1 Resident Population

There are estimated to be 467 residents living within the UDP Boundary area (from an analysis of postcodes and ACORN data). The town centre serves Urmston's total population (including Davyhulme and Flixton) of around 43,492 (2011 census data).

2.2 Vacancy rates

Town Centre Vacancy Rates are monitored on a quarterly basis:

- There are 202 ground floor retail properties in Urmston town centre with 25 currently vacant (as at December 2013).
- The vacancy rate as at November 2013 is 11.9%. This has fallen from 14.4% since July 2012 (29 vacant units in July 2012).
- This compares very well against both the north-west average of 20.1% and national average of 14.1%.

2.3 Number of new businesses opened/closed

Since July 2012:

- 22 new business have opened (13 are independents)
- 3 businesses have relocated within the town centre
- 15 businesses have closed (14 of these were independents)

25 vacant units have been brought back into use compared to 18 that have closed meaning that 7 net additional businesses have opened between July 2012 and December 2013.

2.4 Proportion of independent businesses

The independent business sector is strong in Urmston town centre with around 78% of the businesses being independent.

2.5 Parking provision

Parking is plentiful, but not well distributed, throughout Urmston town centre. The majority is within private ownership but there are also a small number of on street parking spaces available as well as Council owned car parks on Manor Avenue, Atkinson Road and Park Road North.

The numbers of spaces in the private car parks are shown in Table 1, Council owned car parks in Table 2 and on-street spaces in Table 3.

Table 1. Private Sector Car Parks and Number of Spaces

Private Car Park	Number of spaces
Eden Square Car Park	486
Total	486

Table 2. Council Owned Car Parks and Number of Spaces

Council Owned Car Parks	Number of spaces
Manor Avenue	74
Atkinson Road	25
Park Road North	100
Total	199

Table 3. Council On Street Parking and Number of Spaces

On Street Parking	Number of spaces
Crofts Bank Road	3
Flixton Road	31
Gloucester Road	15
Total	49

One particular issue that has been highlighted during this work is the lack of on street parking to serve the shops on Station Road. Poor signage to the Council owned car park on Manor Avenue has been raised as an issue and the Town Centre Investment Fund will be used to improve signage to this car park from Stretford Road and Church Road. On street parking in Urmston is free.

Private car parking in Eden Square's car park is good value compared to private car parks elsewhere in Trafford:

- Free parking for the first 3 hours
- £2.50 for 3 to 4 hours
- £10 for more than 4 hours

2.7 Crime

Crime statistics for the past two years are found in Table 4. It is positive to note that most types of crimes have reduced compared to the previous year, including the total number of crimes. It is also worth noting that where there has been a high percentage increase in Domestic Burglary, the total numbers are small, so although the 60% rise may appear to be alarming, the rise concerns only 3 additional reported incidents over 12 months. However a 20% increase in theft was the result of 18 additional incidents.

Table 4. Crime in Urmston town centre

Performance Measure	2012/13	2011/12	Variance +/-	% Variance
STP3: Total Recorded Crime	273	281	-8	-2.8%
STP4: Serious Acquisitive Crime	26	27	-1	-3.7%
STP5: Domestic Burglary	8	5	3	60.0%
STP6: Robbery	1	1	0	0.0%
STP7: Vehicle Crime	17	18	-1	-5.6%
STP8: Theft	105	87	18	20.7%
STP9: Criminal Damage	41	46	-5	-10.9%
STP29: Violence Against Person with Injury	31	*	N/A	N/A
STP30: Serious Sexual Offences	0	0	0	0
STP13: Total number of ASB Incidents	134	148	-14	-9.5%
Total number of Fly-tipping Incidents	10	15	-5	-33.3%
Total number of Graffiti Incidents	1	0	1	0

*Not Recorded in 2011/12

2.6 Business rates

The total rateable value for the whole of the town centre is estimated to be £4,118,570. The other town centres in Trafford are estimated as follows:

- Altrincham - £25,669,760
- Stretford - £5,250,071
- Sale - £8,924,925

3. SWOT Analysis

A SWOT Analysis (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, **T**hreats) was carried out to provide an assessment of the baseline position for the town centre and the direction of travel required to:

- build on its strengths;
- manage its weakness and address the gaps;
- identify and grasp the opportunities; and
- have awareness of the threats, and manage where possible.

The SWOT Analysis is shown on the following two pages:

Internal Factors**Strengths****Location & Accessibility**

- Pedestrianised shopping in Eden Square is easy and accessible
- Good transport links by train, bus, cycle and car - less than a mile to M60 motorway
- Train links to Manchester and Liverpool are fast and frequent
- Large residential populations close by - relatively affluent with disposable income
- High quality housing surrounds the centre with varied housing types
- Good quality schools in the vicinity
- Lots of low cost private, Council owned and on street car parking
- Eden Square multi-storey car park is well maintained, clean and secure

Offer

- Supermarkets – Sainsburys, Aldi, Iceland
- Big retail names present e.g. Poundland, Boots, Greggs, Quality Save
- High proportion, , of independent retailers (78% of all businesses) with a varied offer
- Good health and beauty offer with lots of hairdressers and beauticians
- Active evening economy - lots of restaurants/cafés/pubs
- Public facilities – Library
- Eden Square – excellent for town centre events and well maintained
- Four/five events per year organised by Urmston Partnership
- Good representation of business and professional services sector
- Presence of three traditional butchers and cake shop
- Urmston Market offers a range of fruit, vegetables etc.

Public Realm

- Trees and greenery in Golden Hill Park; adjacent to the town centre
- Attractive trees along Crofts Bank Road
- Clean seating and entertainment area in Eden Square
- Residential apartments in Eden Square create a community feel

Other

- Low vacancies compared to Altrincham and Stretford town centres
- Relatively safe with little crime
- Presence of a proactive Town Centre Partnership with community groups and schools involved with the Town Centre Partnership
- Community spirit – people associate with the town centre from Urmston, Flixton and Davyhulme
- Opportunities for start-up businesses – small unit sizes along Flixton Road
- Pro-active Operational Manager for Eden Square is very involved with the Partnership

Weaknesses**Location & Accessibility**

- Close proximity to Trafford Centre and Trafford Retail Park
- Traffic congestion at certain times of day particularly at Station Road/Flixton Road/Crofts Bank Road junction
- Traffic congestion at Sumner Way/Crofts Bank Road junction (due to traffic exiting Eden Square car park)
- Poor signage to Council owned car parks
- Railway Station is poorly signed and difficult to find if unfamiliar with the area
- Lack of on street parking to serve Station Road businesses

Offer

- Negative reputation of night time economy on Flixton Road and in Victoria Parade
- Lack of high-end bars and restaurants
- Poor mix of retail – certain types of shops missing e.g. men's and children's clothing and shoes
- No traditional, independent bakers/greengrocer/fishmonger/florist
- Lots of discount/budget shops in Eden Square but shortage of higher-end named retailers
- Poor leisure and cultural / arts offer e.g. no cinema, arts centre, theatre

Public Realm

- Lack of greenery on Station Road and Flixton Road
- Poor quality buildings and high vacancies in Victoria Parade (Higher Road)

Other

- Large number of vacant units on Flixton Road; encouraging shoppers down this road is difficult
- Main activity is in Eden Square where the majority of shoppers park; smaller businesses elsewhere in the town centre are affected by reduced trade
- High number of takeaways on Station Road can lead to inactivity during the day
- Urmston Market has declined significantly in recent years resulting in concerns from traders (privately owned)

Opportunities

Location & Accessibility

- Improved signage to Council owned car parks
- Encouraging residents from outside of Urmston to visit the town centre
- Improve access to train station and provision of information
- Unused land behind shops on Station Road could be used to provide parking for Station Road shops with consent from the land owner

Development Opportunities

- Regeneration of Victoria Parade (Higher Road)
- Encouraging offices on vacant upper floors
- Improvements to units through the Town Centres Loan Scheme

Offer

- Encouraging/supporting more independent bars to open in the town centre to improve the quality of the night time economy
- Development of pop up shops to support small traders
- Encourage different uses for vacant units, other than retail
- Increased frequency and marketing of events e.g. development of a farmers/artisan market in the town centre
- Bringing in non-retail uses to improve the leisure offer and increase footfall; possibly along Flixton Road

Public Realm

- Funding identified for Environmental Improvements including greening
- Improved public realm linking Eden Square and Golden Hill Park
- Interest in former Co-op unit in Victoria Parade could stimulate further regeneration of the surrounding area

Marketing

- Marketing of Urmston town centre's offer and it's unique selling points
- Pro-active media support including local newspapers and social media
- Encouraging more local businesses to join the Town Centre Partnership in order to work together

Other

- Action by the Police to address safety concerns about the night time economy on Flixton Road and Victoria Parade
- Redevelopment of Urmston Market if sold or leased; Town Centre Partnership could then work with traders to promote/organise events

Threats

Financial Pressures

- High business rates are one of the most significant concerns reported by small independent businesses; however, business rates could increase if reviewed
- Economic situation - low consumer spending power
- Changing retailer strategies – fewer stores serving larger catchments
- Cost of public realm improvements – limited resources

Offer

- Increasing numbers of charity shops, pound shops, bookmakers, discount shops etc. dominating the high street (as in many other centres)
- Quick turnover of small independent businesses as some close due to financial pressures
- Management of Urmston Market reluctant to invest in the market to work with the Council or Town Centre Partnership; until the market is sold or leased improvements may not be seen

Competition

- Significant competition from the nearby Trafford Centre and Trafford Retail Park; close proximity draws residents out of the town centre
- Online shopping

Reputation

- Negative reputation of night time economy on Flixton Road and Victoria Parade

4. Current activities & issues

Note: A comprehensive summary of the actions is contained in Appendix 2.

4.1 Urmston Market

Urmston Market is privately owned and has declined in recent years resulting in concerns from traders and the local community. Trafford Council officers have met with the owners of Urmston Market to offer support in securing funding to regenerate the market area and support with organising events to increase footfall; however, the owners are reluctant to invest finances in the form of match funding and feel that events will not sustain long term footfall.

4.2 Reinventing the High Street

Stakeholder Involvement

It is important that all Stakeholders are involved and work together to drive change. A membership recruitment drive for the Town Centre Partnership was undertaken in 2013, largely through the organised events and activities which only Partnership members can participate in. This has resulted in 19 additional businesses joining the Partnership in 2013 compared to 2012, including some home based businesses in Urmston and Flixton.

The Town Centre Partnership is supported by pro-active volunteers especially with regards to events, the living Christmas tree and maintaining town centre planters:

- Kip McGrath Tuition Centre Urmston and Flixton Brownies maintain the town centre planters for the Partnership
- TJP Contractors Ltd maintain the fencing and plants around the living Christmas tree
- Delivery of Partnership newsletters is supported by local residents who are members of the partnership
- Set-up and operations at events is supported by a range of businesses and Partnership members

4.3 Independents and Business Support

Independent retailers with local connections generally have a closer relationship with local communities and the local economy. More of the money spent in them is liable to stay and re-circulate in the local area and they are more likely to support other local businesses, compared with national and international suppliers. The level of independent businesses in Urmston town centre is high with around 78% of all businesses being independent. This has resulted in enquiries regarding business rates, funding opportunities and general support for small businesses.

Economic Growth

The Economic Growth Team provides advice and support to new businesses that make enquiries. This includes advice on potential funding opportunities, making contact with landlords and agents and often signposting businesses to relevant support agencies and initiatives (either local, GM level or national) based on the specific nature of their enquiries. For example, many new start-up businesses are signposted to Blue Orchid who offer new start up advice. This includes many businesses who have enquired about the Town Centres Loan Scheme.

A list of available business support for town centre businesses is currently kept by the Economic Growth Team and is circulated to businesses that make enquiries. This information will be kept up to date and made available the Business pages of Trafford Council's website which the Economic Growth Team manages.

Loan Scheme

The Town Centres Loan Scheme has been running since February 2013. In Urmston £19,000 has been allocated: a loan has been awarded to a new chandelier business opening in a vacant unit on Higher Road and funding has also been ring-fenced for a second business, Cheeky Cherub's Soft Play Centre which is hoping to open in Victoria Parade subject, providing the business can find the remaining funding elsewhere.

In September 2012, Trafford Council awarded £62,500 to help to secure the occupation of vacant units in Urmston town centre. The Town Centre Partnership asked for £20,000 of this to be put towards the Town Centres Loan Scheme with an extra £20,000 funding to be allocated to the scheme if sufficient interest is generated.

A review of the scheme has been carried out and the scheme has subsequently been improved based on feedback that has been gathered from potential applicants. Applicants must now have 25% match funding (reduced from 50%) and can spend up to 50% of the loan on revenue costs (previously 100% of the loan needed to be spent on interior or exterior refurbishment). The Loans remain interest free and payment terms of up to three years remain.

A new publicity drive will take place in the New Year.

4.4 Events

Events are an important way of promoting the town centres and attracting additional footfall. The Town Centre Partnership holds a number of events throughout the year including: Spring Fayre; Food Festival; Christmas Lights Switch On and Market; and a Halloween event. The Partnership is keen for these events to continue in 2014 and encourage more businesses to be involved. The events are publicised through the local press, posters in the town centre, social media and by Partnership members.

Urmston Spring Fayre

In April 2013, a Spring Fayre took place in Eden Square and on Golden Hill Park. The event included crafts and food stalls in Eden Square along with children's activities and entertainment including dance and music performances from local groups. A fun fair was organised on Golden Hill Park to spread the activity across the town centre and to draw more visitors to the event. Over 1000 attended this event.

Urmston Food Festival

The first Food Festival took place in September 2013. Over 25 food stalls were on offer in Eden Square; most were local businesses from Urmston and Flixton. Cafes, restaurants and pubs across the town centre offered discounts and specials on the day which were promoted by the Town Centre Partnership. Thousands of visitors attended the event and the traders in the Town Centre reported increased trading and footfall.

Halloween Spectacular

The first Halloween Event took place in October 2013 and included children's activities such as crafts, painting and gingerbread making in Eden Square, and spooky story telling in Costa Coffee. A spooky walk was organised in Golden Hill with Partnership members making the decorations voluntarily. Hundreds of families turned out to the event.

Christmas Market

The first Christmas Market took place in November 2013. Over 35 stalls were on offer selling food, crafts and gifts alongside children's activities. The event significantly increased footfall in the town centre and the retailers reported increase trading.

Christmas Lights Switch On

The annual Christmas Lights Switch on event has become a larger event over the past two years. The Partnership planted a living Christmas tree on Queens Road in 2012 and Christmas Lights Switch On activities now take place at two sites in Urmston; Eden Square and Queens Road.

At both sites, visitors can watch performances from local dance and music groups such as Urmston Musical Theatre, English Martyrs School Choir, 3rd Davyhulme Scout & Guide Band and Flixton Academy of Performing Arts.

In 2014, a small Christmas Market at Queens Road will be added to the Queen's Road site; consideration will also be given to coordinating the Christmas Market and Eden Square Christmas Lights Switch On event on the same day to ensure the Christmas Lights Switch On events in Eden Square and Queens Road do not clash.

4.5 Promotional Activities

Retail Offers/Discounts

Businesses promoted offers and discounts at the Urmston Food Festival in September 2013 to encourage people to shop in the town centre. The offers and discounts contributed to a small increase in footfall in to these businesses; this concept will be developed in 2014.

Offers and discounts were also sought for veterans on Armed Forces Day in 2013. A lack of publicity of the offers and discounts meant footfall in these businesses did not increase on the day; however publicity will be improved if offers and discounts are sought for the 2014 event.

Town Centre Competitions

The Town Centre Partnership organise two competitions per year which involved town centre businesses who are members of the Partnership; an Easter Egg Hunt and Christmas Bauble Hunt/Poster competition.

Over 2000 competition forms are distributed to local schools. Around 20 business members participate in each of the competitions which involve children visiting each business; this increases footfall around the town centre and encourages parents to visit a range of new shops.

4.6 Places for People

Environmental works

£55,000 was allocated for environmental improvements in Urmston town centre from the Town Centres Investment Fund. Phase 1 is now partially complete and will carry out the initial priorities identified by the Partnership. The works include:

- Planting of trees along Flixton Road and Station Road to improve the 'green feel' to the town centre
- Replacing and repairing of paving stones
- Painting and refurbishment of railings and street furniture
- Improving signage to Council owned car parks
- Installing the town centre clock and community noticeboard (to be managed by Urmston Partnership)
- Providing additional litter bins on Crofts Bank Road
- Clearing, pruning and deep cleaning next to railway station entrance

The works are due to be completed by March 2014.

Maintenance

Ensuring that Urmston looks attractive and is well maintained is important to attracting visitors and encouraging dwell time. The main pedestrian thoroughfare is Eden Square which is clean and inviting. Station Road, Flixton Road and Higher Road have some maintenance issues which the Town Centre Environmental Fund is to address.

4.7 Marketing / Communication / Information

Communications

Information to businesses and residents about Urmston town centre is communicated in a variety of ways but chiefly through the Town Centre Partnership's website, blog, quarterly business newsletters, social media pages and press releases. The Stronger Communities team oversee these communication networks and carry out regular business visits on behalf of Urmston Partnership to ensure good communication.

The Urmston Partnership Twitter account now has over 830 followers and the Facebook Page has recently been revived.

5. Future Opportunities / Actions

Note: A comprehensive summary of the actions is contained in Appendix 2.

5.1 Urmston Market

There has been recent interest by a company in purchasing Urmston Market; unfortunately the sale has not been completed but has raised hopes amongst the traders and the local community that if the market were to be sold or leased there may be a greater possibility of revival. If sold or leased, the Urmston Partnership is keen to work with the new management.

In the interim, Urmston Partnership plan to meet with some of the market traders in the New Year to understand how the Town Centre Partnership can support them to increase footfall in to the market; the Town Centre Partnership are willing to support with organisation of events and publicity subject to the management's agreement.

5.2 Reinventing the High Street

Although Urmston has a lower vacancy rate than many town centres around the Country it is important that this is tracked and 'future proofing' measures implemented to ensure vacancy levels do not increase. Changing consumer habits, retailer strategies and the threat of online shopping mean that there is a need to adapt. The town centre should no longer be considered as a solely retail space – other community, work, leisure and residential uses must be encouraged.

Landlords'/Retailers' Forums

Setting up a forum for landlords and agents to communicate and share information and explore options for filling vacant units could be a suitable option for Urmston. This approach has been successfully trialled by Altrincham Forward.

A retailers' forum could be another option to encourage retailers to work together to come up with and implement ideas which can improve the town. This could be either a sub-group of the Town Centre Partnership focusing on retail focused issues or a separate group, preferably with a strong lead from the retailers themselves.

In establishing these groups there is a need to think clearly about the objectives. In Altrincham the Landlords forum was set up to focus on reducing the high vacancy rates. For Urmston, with a lower vacancy rate, the focus could be on getting more people to shop and stay longer in the town centre and improving its overall appearance.

Use of Vacant Units

Inventive ways to ensure use of vacant units should be explored. For example, some of the activities that have been implemented in Altrincham could also be implemented in Urmston:

- Window Displays – Independent retailers in Altrincham have created window displays in the vacant Grafton's units on Stamford New Road based around particular themes e.g. weddings/ bridal. A similar approach could be applied relatively easily in Eden Square as the Partnership has a good relationship with the Savills' Operational Manager.
- Arts/Events – In Altrincham there have been successful examples of using vacant units for Photography Exhibitions and a pop up Health and Wellbeing Centre. This could be considered for Urmston although there is not currently a strong arts offer in the town centre. Trafford College, Trafford Leisure Trust and Davyhulme Camera Club could be involved.
- Pop-up shops – Vacant units could be used to provide short term occupation for retailers trying to test the market or promote a new product. This option seems popular amongst small home businesses who attend the Town Centre Partnership events. The Urmston Partnership has allocated £20k or the £60k Town Centre Fund for a Trader's Hub or pop up shop. The Council's Stronger Communities Team and Economic Growth Team will be working together in the New Year to develop a 'pop up shop strategy' for Urmston town centre which will include a pop up shop in the proposed Cheeky Cherubs Soft Play Centre in Victoria Parade.

If a Landlords' or Retailers' Forum is established in Urmston then this could make the implementation of some of these activities easier, though it is not essential. Trafford College or local schools could be contacted to see if they wish to become involved in using units for art or educational projects. There are potential funding issues (e.g. business rates for the period of occupation) that would need to be resolved if these activities are to be implemented.

Savills and Ask would be a key player in any discussions about vacant units in Eden Square within a potential Landlords' Forum although there are now only four vacant units within Eden Square as there has been a recent increase in businesses moving in to the Square.

5.3 Independents and Business Support

Business Support Package

There are a number of activities that could be carried out in Urmston town centre that would promote business opportunities in the town and support the large independent sector. A support package could be developed for retailers that could be tailored individually to Urmston. This support is particularly important for existing independent retailers who will not have access to the same resources as larger multiples. This could include extending a skills package currently being delivered in Altrincham with discounted prices for customer service skills. If there is no take-up in Altrincham then it could be considered whether this could be rolled out more widely.

The Virtual Saturday Job project (West Locality Partnership) will be developed using Urmston town centre businesses. When the Partington Pledge is rolled out across Trafford, Urmston town centre businesses could be targeted through the Town Centre Partnership to recruit residents aged 18 to 24 from Flixton where youth unemployment is a hot spot in the Urmston area.

Small Business Rates Relief Scheme

A further activity around business rates that may assist some smaller businesses would be to identify eligible businesses who have not already taken up the small business rates relief scheme (through the Business Rates section) and encouraging them to do so. The relief for eligible businesses (occupying properties with rateable values below £12,000) can be 50-100%.

Autumn Statement 2013

A number of new schemes were announced as part of the Government's Autumn Statement 2013 that will help Town Centre Businesses and will be promoted by the Economic Growth team. This includes:

- Temporary reoccupation relief, granting a 50% discount from business rates for new occupants of premises that have been empty for the previous 18 months.
- £1000 discount for premises with rateable value up to £50,000 for next two years.
- 2% Cap on business rates.

5.4 Events

Work should continue to ensure that events are delivered during the next 12 months, with a focus on the four events organised in 2013. More frequent events such as artisan or farmers markets elsewhere in the town centre (rather than Eden Square) would be hugely beneficial to the town centre and local communities; this is currently being considered by the Stronger Communities Team, Urmston Partnership and local traders for Higher Road in early 2014.

The planned 2014 events will include:

- Urmston Spring Fayre on Saturday 26th April
- Urmston Food Festival on Saturday 21st September
- Halloween Spectacular on 31st October
- Christmas Lights Switch On event (at the Christmas tree on Queens Road) on Friday 21st November
- Christmas Market and Christmas Lights Switch On event (in Eden Square) on Saturday 29th November

If the artisan/farmers market on Higher Road goes ahead a road closure would be required. Interest has been generated amongst local businesses keen to hold a stall and the Urmston Partnership will be meeting with the traders on Higher Road in the New Year to discuss the operation of the market.

5.5 Places for People

Ensuring that the town centre is attractive and provides a pleasant experience for visitors and shoppers is vital to its success.

Eden Square Shopping Centre

The completion of Eden Square will provide improved public realm and an enhanced retail offer in the heart of the town centre. 18 of the 22 units in Eden Square are now occupied with Lily's at Eden, Poundland and Explore Learning being the most recent businesses to open.

Victoria Parade

Victoria Parade is in need of regeneration and refurbishment; a large proportion of the units are vacant. A regeneration proposal was put forward a number of years ago but was not realised.

There is potential to revive Victoria Parade and the owner's agents have recently been in contact with Trafford Council's Economic Growth team. Cheeky Cherubs Soft Play Centre which is due to open in Victoria Parade early 2014 could initiate the revival of the area; if the pop up shop within Cheeky Cherubs is successful, the scheme could be expanded in to an adjacent vacant unit within Victoria Parade.

Environmental Improvements

Phase 2 of the town centre Environmental Works is to provide additional greening in the town centre, providing improved links to surrounding parks and open spaces. Proposals have been drawn up and were presented to the Town Centre Partnership in November 2013. The focus of the green proposals is to link the town centre with the nearby parks such as Goldenhill and Davyhulme, to encourage dwell time by creating a green connection/environment that will appeal to adults and their children. The works will include improving entrances and replacing furniture in Golden Hill Park.

Car Parking

Although the total number of car parking spaces in Urmston does not appear to be a problem at the present time, the most significant issues appear to be the directional signage to Council owned car parks and lack of on street parking to serve the businesses on Station Road. The pedestrian routes from the Council owned car parks could also be made more attractive.

Directional signage to Council owned car parks is being addressed through the Town Centre Investment Fund. Parking options are to be highlighted on publicity for events. The parking section on the Urmston Partnership website highlights all of the parking options in the town centre and should include a map to show where the parking is located.

Cycling

The town centre is accessible by bicycle; however, the access is along busy traffic routes. The provision of cycling stands in the town centre could be reviewed to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in the locations where there are greatest requirements.

5.6 Marketing / Communication / Information

Press

Existing marketing activities should continue. There should be proactive press releases based around key achievements and opportunities; sustainable links with the Advertiser and Messenger newspapers can be difficult for the Town Centre Partnership to maintain due to the high turnover of reporters. Key milestones should be identified well in advance so that the communications can be issued quickly when required.

Websites

Information on the Town Centre Partnership and Council websites should be reviewed and developed to ensure they are useful and relevant to users and kept up to date.

The Council has recently updated its website including a section aimed specifically at 'Business'. This section is to be expanded by to include more detailed information on the support available to businesses, including the Town Centres Loan Scheme.

The new town centre websites are currently being developed and Urmston's website will be a trailblazer for Sale and Stretford. The Stronger Communities team is currently working with IT to develop the appearance and content of the new Urmston town centre website which will be designed and operational in the New Year.

The Urmston Town Centre website will include information on all town centre businesses but will give greater emphasis to the Urmston Partnership members as a membership benefit. A 'business' page will be dedicated to attracting new investment and the support services available to existing businesses. The website will also include links to other areas of the Council's website that might be of use, such as licensing, environmental health and business rates.

Links to and from Visit Trafford pages could attract more people into the town centre by highlighting the Town Centre as part of the wider offer within the local area.

Town Centre Profiles

The Economic Growth Team have now drafted the text for a document that will contain profiles of each of the town centres plus a section highlighting the benefits of what Trafford has to offer business looking to locate in the Borough. It will also be used as a tool to help promote the Town Centres Loan Scheme.

Performance Dashboards

Following on from a successful pilot of the ‘Performance Dashboard’ in Altrincham town centre, it is planned for this template to be rolled out to the other town centres to monitor key performance indicators, with work carried out by Economic Growth and Stronger Communities teams. Data collection is already underway. Discussions are also taking place with New Economy to develop indicators which link into work across Greater Manchester.

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6. Funding

6.1 Sponsorship

Opportunities for sponsorship should be pursued in order to raise money to enable events and deliver regeneration activities. There are four areas for which this has been or should be explored:

- Sponsorship of events (including the four main Partnership events) – to enable more frequent or better quality events. Costa Coffee has provisionally offered £400 to Urmston Partnership towards the cost of the Christmas Lights Switch On event in 2014.
- Sponsorship of the living Christmas tree lights – The Town Centre Partnership engaged with local businesses in regards to sponsoring lights and baubles on the living Christmas tree in 2013; the Partnership secured £1500 from Electricity North West Ltd for the Christmas tree lights and town centre lights, and secured approximately £140 in donations from Partnership members for the Christmas tree baubles and decorations.
- Sponsorship of Christmas lights across the town centre – the Partnership secured £1500 from Electricity North West Ltd in 2013 (see above). The Partnership could engage with town centre businesses in 2014 with regards to Christmas lights as well as Christmas tree lights, decorations and cost of events.
- Sponsorship of town centre competitions organised by the Urmston Partnership; two to three competitions are organised per year participating businesses are asked to donate a prize amounting to £5 or £10

Sponsorship opportunities do not need to be restricted to town centre businesses. There may be businesses elsewhere in the town who may wish to contribute in exchange for mention of their contribution on advertising and signage.

6.2 External Funding Opportunities

Other external funding opportunities to deliver regeneration and Economic Development activities should be continually monitored. At the current time, the scope for public sector funding for retail areas is generally more limited than other employment sectors, as it is more difficult to demonstrate genuine economic growth rather than displacement of activity from other areas. Also, with moves towards loan funding in preference to grant, it is difficult to find support for activities such as public realm improvements which do not directly generate a return.

6.3 Business Funding

As part of the business support activities of the Economic Growth Team, advice is given to businesses of all kinds about potential grant or loan funding opportunities that are available at the time. This includes providing information on funding and other business support opportunities on the Trafford Council website and producing a Business Support listings booklet.

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7. Governance Structures and Monitoring

7.1 Partnerships

There are now fewer resources within the public sector to implement improvements than there have been in the past. Therefore it is important to ensure that all stakeholders, particularly businesses and property owners, are involved in the delivering activity in Urmston town centre. The Landlords' and Retailers' Forums discussed in Section 5.1 are examples of this approach.

The Stronger Communities Team will continue to source and secure new members to join the Town Centre Partnership. Regular newsletters should continue to provide information on progress and opportunities.

It is also important to show that the Partnership is a “doing group” which is reflected in the scope of town centre events and activities which the Partnership organises. More business support sessions could be developed by the Partnership alongside Trafford Council to support small independent businesses seeking advice. Some Urmston Partnership members are extremely pro-active whilst others do not engage in Partnership activities or events; it is important for the Partnership Committee to stress to members that they must be pro-active in order to help the town centre and subsequently their own businesses.

The annual Town Centre Partnerships Forum is next scheduled for May 2014. The purpose of this forum is to allow businesses and external stakeholders from each town centre partnership within Trafford to share best practice ideas and input into future Strategy. The legal status and structure of each of the partnerships could be reviewed to understand what the best approach is to deliver action. For example there may be financial advantages to gaining charitable status e.g. a development trust with charitable status could get rates relief if the partnerships were to take on responsibility for pop-up shops.

7.2 Private Sector Income

In order to deliver a greater level of improvements and activities to help to promote the town centre with limited public sector resources, it is imperative that contributions are secured from the private sector. Businesses could be asked to contribute on a voluntary or compulsory basis but either route might be difficult to implement because of the challenging conditions that retailers currently face, meaning that businesses may feel they don't have spare money to contribute. Therefore a strong case would need to be made about the value they would get from the funding invested and how the businesses would benefit. A membership scheme with clearly identified benefits, particularly financial, may stand the greatest chance of success.

Ask and Savills (Eden Square) have invested a large amount into the regeneration of the town centre, with most recent investment being a significant improvement in their Christmas lights. A dedicated Operational Manager was also recruited in 2013 and the Operational Manager has developed excellent links with the Town Centre Partnership.

Voluntary contributions

Businesses could be asked to pay voluntarily into a fund perhaps as a membership fee, where there would be clearly defined activities implemented using the funding; although businesses may not be keen to contribute to this fund as well as paying the Urmston Partnership membership fee.

The success of the scheme may be limited because of the difficulties in persuading businesses to pay into a fund where not every business would contribute and those who do not pay might receive benefits. Additionally, if businesses are able to opt-out then this reduces the scope for income generation.

Voluntary contributions may be more effective for smaller 'one off' projects where there may be some goodwill involved e.g. Christmas tree baubles and decorations as highlighted in section 6.1 where in 2013 individual businesses gained recognition of their contributions by Urmston Partnership.

Business Improvement District

The Altrincham Forward model of governance and generating sustainable income could provide potential options for other towns within Trafford, including Urmston. The potential for a Business Improvement District (BID) in Altrincham town centre will be clearer in the next 12-18 months and it should then be considered whether this approach is suitable for other town centres.

The potential to set up a BID in Urmston is not something that has been discussed with Urmston Partnership and is not something the Partnership would currently support.

8.0 Conclusion/Next Steps

The Urmston Town Centre Roadmap provides an overarching plan for the physical, economic and community development activities taking place in Urmston over the next 12 months. It will also form the basis for the production of a Delivery Plan to set out future activity in the town centre which will be prepared in conjunction with the Urmston Town Centre Partnership and other key stakeholders.

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Appendix 2 – Comprehensive Summary of Activities

Insert excel spread sheet

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