

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 18th November 2015
Report of: Executive Member for Economic Growth and Planning

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, Urmston and Partington centres.

Recommendation(s)

To note the contents of the report.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Background Papers: N/A

Financial Impact:	Not applicable
Legal Impact:	Not applicable
Human Resources Impact:	Not applicable
Asset Management Impact:	Not applicable
E-Government Impact:	Not applicable
Risk Management Impact:	Not applicable
Health and Safety Impact:	Not applicable

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Trafford's main town centres as defined in the Trafford Core Strategy – Altrincham, Sale, Stretford and Urmston – and Partington, a key local centre, provide five unique centres which complement each other, offering the people of Trafford a range of facilities and services right on their doorstep. Supporting and regenerating the town centres is a major priority and focus for the Council as they are an important part of the social and economic fabric of the Borough. They provide employment, retail, leisure and other essential services to meet the needs of local communities.

1.2 The Council has taken a strategic and coordinated approach to the sustainability and regeneration of the town centres in partnership with local stakeholders and residents. This includes: The Stretford Masterplan and Movement and Public Realm Study; the Sale and Urmston Improvement Plans, the Altrincham Strategy; and upcoming Altrincham Business Neighbourhood Plan. This report provides a comprehensive update on recent and future activity in each of the Borough's town centres.

1.3 Performance Monitoring

The current average vacancy rate of 16.0% has shown a decrease compared to the same period in 2014 (i.e. 17.3%), and improved performance has been shown in Altrincham and Stretford town centres. Although Sale and Urmston have risen slightly, both are still below the north-west averages.

	Vacancy Rate (%) Sept 14	Vacancy Rate (%) Sept 15
Altrincham	17.7	17.1
Sale	10.6	11.6
Stretford	43.4	33.8
Urmston	6.8	8.2
	17.3	16.0

1.4 Town Centres Loan Scheme

To date 20 Town Centres Loan Scheme applications have been approved, with a four further applications currently being processed (Altrincham and Urmston). Applications approved to date are summarised below:

Over £190,000 has now been awarded, over £850,000 of private sector funding has been levered in and over 80 jobs created. A full list of approvals is shown in Appendix 1.

1.5 Communications

Communications activity has been ongoing in all of the town centres. Regular newsletters are produced (2 per year in Sale, Stretford and Urmston plus 6 in Altrincham) and frequent updates are posted through social media for Sale, Urmston and Altrincham (Sale and Urmston are updated by volunteers). Town

Centre Websites are updated with events and businesses listings. Information on communications activity in Altrincham is highlighted in Section 5.7

2. STRETFORD

2.1 Background and Vision

Securing the successful regeneration of Stretford Town Centre is a key priority for Trafford Council. The Stretford Town Centre Masterplan was approved by the Executive in January 2014. It provides a bold vision for delivering transformational change and sets out a route to securing a sustainable economic future for the Town Centre with lasting improvements to its vibrancy.

The overarching aim of the Masterplan is to secure the successful regeneration of Stretford Town Centre and provide a prosperous, vibrant, attractive and safe destination. Over the last 12 months activity has taken place in a number of areas to deliver the objectives of the Masterplan. The continued implementation of the Masterplan will enable Stretford Town Centre to maximise the opportunities provided by its key assets and create a strong and attractive town centre that is a destination of choice for local people.

2.2 Stretford Masterplan Development

The Stretford Working Group and Stretford Panel have been established to help oversee the implementation of the Masterplan and co-ordinate activity. Chaired by the Executive Member for Economic Growth and Planning, the Working Group is a Council Member and Officer body established to oversee the Masterplan and make recommendations to the Executive for decisions on proposals for its delivery. The Stretford Panel, which includes both business and community representatives from Stretford, has been established to support the delivery of the Masterplan and act as a consultative body to the Working Group.

The Stretford Working Group and Panel have continued to meet to oversee the delivery of the Masterplan . A joint meeting of the Working Group and the Panel was held on 21st July 2015 specifically to discuss the emerging movement and public realm proposals.

2.3 Movement and Public Realm Improvements

The Council commissioned Gillespies/WSP to prepare a Movement and Public Realm Study in to provide a clear strategy for improving movement for pedestrians/cyclists and providing an enhanced public realm and physical environment. The draft study was completed in July 2015 and public consultation was held in September/October 2015 which generated over 300 responses.

A number of potential opportunities for change have been identified at key locations including:

- **Chester Road/Edge Lane Gateway:** Removal of three of the existing subways and provision of surface level pedestrian crossings. Retention of the subway between the Essoldo and Stretford Public Hall to provide a

- choice of crossing method. This will release land for new development or new public space.
- **A56/Chester Road:** Provision of signature lighting columns and higher quality paving to signal to motorists that they are entering the town centre. The opening up of the external frontages of Stretford Mall to provide greater street animation and land made available for public realm improvements around the Mall entrance. Structural tree planting to define the road corridor.
 - **New King Street:** Creation of a street environment along Kingsway with road narrowing to one lane of traffic in each direction. Reconnection of the Stretford grid across New King Street with new development and new public space utilising land from the removal of the subway.
 - **Chester Road South Gateway:** Enhancement of gateway/arrival point by removing the gyratory and releasing land for new landmark development. Improvement of crossing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.

All comments made during the consultation period are currently being analysed and used to inform amendments to the initial proposals. The completed study will provide a basis for the Council to take forward a future tender(s) to provide the outline and detailed design works necessary to deliver identified priority public realm and movement projects.

The next steps will be to complete an assessment of the consultation responses and revise the proposals accordingly by the end of 2015. A phasing plan will then be developed in accordance with the current project funding profile prior to the completion of detailed design works for Phase 1 in 2016. Phase 1 of the improvements could then potentially come forward in 2017, subject to funding.

2.4 Lacy Street

In order to progress the delivery of the Lacy Street site in Stretford, which has been identified as a catalyst for the wider delivery of the Masterplan, feasibility and delivery study for the site was completed in February 2015. The Lacy Street site comprises three separate parcels; the Council owned car park site; the Royal Mail Sorting Office site and the Probation Office site.

Public consultation was held in March/April 2015 in relation to the potential for a residential led mixed use scheme on the Lacy Street site that could open up access to the Bridgewater Canal with broadly positive feedback received. The proposed option comprised:

- Residential development of c75 residential units.
- A potential café/bar unit fronting onto the Bridgewater Canal
- A four-storey budget hotel with a ground floor food operator.
- Car parking to support the new residential and hotel uses.

This option assumes that the adjacent pedestrian subway is removed and replaced with a surface level crossing. Further discussions will be required with the Royal Mail and Probation Service to clarify their willingness to relocate as part of any proposed scheme and their specific requirements.

Whilst the Royal Mail does not have any current plans to relocate or close this facility it is recognised that it is not currently 'perfectly fit for purpose'. If the existing Royal Mail Sorting Office site is to be redeveloped the Council and/or a future delivery partner may need to come to an agreement with this landowner regarding relocation/re-provision of the facility. Initial engagement with the Royal Mail has indicated that there may be an opportunity for the consolidation of the Stretford Delivery Office with another existing facility as part of the rationalisation of their estate. In house consultations are currently considering the potential of this option. As with the Royal Mail Sorting Office site if the Probation Office site is to be redeveloped the Council and/or a future delivery partner will need to come to an agreement with this landowner regarding relocation/re-provision of the facility. Initial engagement with the Probation Service has suggested that they are considering options to consolidate their current portfolio of sites.

The delivery of any future development on the site will be timed to run in parallel with the delivery of the proposed public realm improvement works, ensuring a comprehensive approach. The future delivery of the Royal Canal Works site, on the opposite bank of the Bridgewater Canal, will be considered in light of the emerging proposals for the Lacy Street site.

2.5 Stretford Mall

Regular meetings have taken place with the managing agents (and co-owners) M&M Asset Management and their retail consultants Barker Proudlove to discuss their future plans and how the Council can provide support. These discussions have explored how the Mall can link effectively with other development activity proposed in the town centre including: movement and public realm improvements; the proposed development of the Lacy Street site; and the emerging plans for Stretford Public Hall.

Construction work has commenced on the 16,500 sq. ft. Aldi food store at Stretford Mall, which incorporates the former Wilkinson's unit, and is scheduled to open in June 2016. Pep & Co, a new national low-cost retail chain, has now opened in the unit formerly occupied by Internacionale. A review of the existing car parking arrangements at the Mall is underway.

Pure Gym opened in June 2015 and numbers have been far in excess of those expected. As a consequence Pure Gym is seeking planning consent to extend into the remainder of the vacant former Argos unit. Other recent openings along the Chester Road elevation of the Mall include a crèche, barbers and beauty salon.

A £30,000 investment by the owners of Stretford Mall has been made to the indoor market area and 16 new units opened in August 2015. These units offer flexible and affordable accommodation focused on the requirements of start-up businesses.

St John Ambulance has opened a pop-up training centre in the unit previously occupied by Stretford Hive. The ambition is to train around 1,000 community members at a free or heavily discounted rate.

Stretford Mall has signed the Trafford Pledge and is committed to using local labour. The Mall Manager is acting as an ambassador to get other retailers within the Mall to sign up to the Pledge.

2.6 Stretford Public Hall

Stretford Public Hall was declared surplus by the Council in 2014 when the last remaining occupiers moved out of the building and it was subsequently included in the Land Sales Programme approved by Executive in September 2014. Following an application by the Friends of Stretford Public Hall, the building was placed on the Register of Assets of Public Value in April 2014.

An initial marketing exercise for the disposal of the Public Hall was held in May 2014 after which 15 parties were invited to submit full tenders. Executive approved the disposal of the Public Hall to the Friends of Stretford Public Hall on 18th February 2015 as part of this tender process. The Friends of Stretford Public Hall have now taken ownership of the building and are working up proposals for its reuse. The Council is continuing to engage with the group to provide them with support, where possible, in bringing forward their proposals.

3. SALE

3.1 Sale Town Centre Improvement Plan

To build on the strategic work carried out as part of the Sale Town Centre Road Map, a further phase of strategic work has been developed with a greater focus on the physical aspects of the town centre. The Plan will assist the Council and key stakeholders to identify and realise the opportunities which exist within the town centre over the next 5 years to secure the successful regeneration of Sale town centre and provide a prosperous, vibrant, attractive and safe destination. The objectives of the Plan are:

- 1) To bring forward sustainable development and encourage private sector investment, including residential development.
- 2) To improve the overall quality of the town centre and improve its retail, leisure and services offer, particularly the evening economy.
- 3) To reduce the percentage of vacant properties within the town centre and develop unused, under-used or derelict properties for a mix of uses.
- 4) To promote the town centre shopping and leisure offer and increase footfall, dwell time and spend.
- 5) To create a strong sense of place within the town centre and improve key town centre gateways.
- 6) To provide clear signage throughout Sale town centre and improve pedestrian and cycle accessibility through the area.
- 7) To promote the commercial offering in Sale.
- 8) To encourage town centre businesses and other stakeholders to work together to deliver change.

The Town Centre Partnership will be asked to endorse the Plan and the Framework will become part of the work plan to be picked up by the new Town Centres Team.

3.2 **Environmental Works**

Environmental improvement works have been completed in Sale town centre. A section of School Road, between Boots and Aldi, has been repaved and landscaping works have been completed including the refurbishment of planters, benches and litter bins. Most of the planters are now adopted and maintained.

3.3 **Work with Sale Town Partnership**

The Sale Town Partnership is a not for profit group that helps to tackle everyday issues that affect the area and to promote Sale. The Sale Town Partnership Action Plan 2013-15 sets out the following vision for the town centre:

“To ensure that Sale is a prosperous and vibrant town that offers a diverse range of activities in an attractive, clean and safe environment for the enjoyment of the local community and visitors alike”

The overall objective of the Partnership is to ‘ensure that Sale is a prosperous and vibrant town that offers a diverse range of activities in an attractive, clean and safe environment for the enjoyment of the local community and visitors alike’. The Partnership works to do this through promoting and raising the profile of Sale as a place to shop, relax and enjoy; creating an environment to be proud of and a safe and secure town centre.

Events are one of the ways in which the Partnership aims to increase footfall to the Town Centre, including Farmers’ markets, Christmas and Summer. The Sale Festival took place on Saturday 6th June 2015. The event included a farmers market along School Road and live entertainment in the Square from local community groups.

3.4 **Make Sale Smile**

Individuals and groups in Sale were invited to apply for up to £10,000 as part of the Make Sale Smile initiative. Two activities in the town centre were awarded funding. These are:

- Sale Arts Trail created a grotto in the Sale Square Shopping Centre
- Sale Safari Footprint Trail, was based on The Zoo as founder of Chester Zoo, George Mottershead, lived in Sale. Participants followed “animal footprint” trails and collected stamps from retailers.

4. **URMSTON**

4.1 **Urmston Town Centre Improvement Plan**

To build on the strategic work carried out as part of the Urmston Town Centre Road Map, a further phase of strategic work has been developed with a greater focus on the physical aspects of the town centre. The Plan will assist the

Council and key stakeholders to identify and realise the opportunities which exist within the town centre over the next 5 years to secure the successful regeneration of Urmston town centre and provide a prosperous, vibrant, attractive and safe destination. The objectives of the Plan are:

- 1) To encourage private sector investment that realises the full potential of Urmston town centre.
- 2) To improve the overall quality of the town centre and improve its retail, leisure and services offer, particularly the evening economy.
- 3) To maintain the percentage of vacant properties within the town centre below the regional average and develop unused, under-used or derelict properties for a mix of uses.
- 4) To promote the town centre shopping and leisure offer and increase footfall, dwell time and spend.
- 5) To create a strong sense of place within the town centre and improve key town centre gateways.
- 6) To encourage town centre businesses and other stakeholders to work together to deliver change.

The Town Centre Partnership will be asked to endorse the Plan and the Framework will become part of the work plan to be picked up by the new Town Centres Team.

4.2 **Environmental Works**

The environmental improvements are now complete including: the planting of fifteen new trees; installation of two new bins; and eleven new planters, which will be maintained by local businesses. A community noticeboard has also been installed on Flixton Road which will be managed by the Urmston Partnership.

Parking improvements were implemented on Higher Road, including 1 hour and 2 hour Traffic Regulation Orders, which has increased the available parking for visitors to local businesses. Changes to lining and signage have also been made.

A draft for improvements to the play area in Goldenhill Park has been drawn up, the recently formed Friends Group are now looking to source match funding to expand these proposals. The Group carried out a consultation at the recent Food Festival to gauge what local residents aspirations are for the future of the park. They are now considering these responses and will be including them in their Action Plan.

4.3 **Work with the Urmston Partnership**

The Urmston Partnership is a non-profit, self-funding organisation formed to actively engage in improving Urmston and in promote the town as a place to visit. The Urmston Town Centre Partnership Action Plan 2015-16 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”

The Partnership focuses on promoting the existing businesses in the town, encouraging new businesses and planning events and activities to increase footfall in the town centre. It involves local businesses (including major retailers and independents) developers and landowners, residents, community groups, schools, representatives from Trafford Council and other statutory organisations. The Urmston Partnership's three overall aims for 2015-16 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 Partnerships and Communities Team supports the organisation of an annual schedule of events including Spring, Halloween, Christmas and a food festival. A Spring Fayre took place on 9th May 2015 which included entertainment, food/gift stalls and a fun fair on Golden Hill Park.

The Urmston Partnership is developing a town centre map to highlight key attractions in Urmston and promote "Dementia Friendly" businesses. Members of the Urmston Partnership have been invited to advertise on the town centre map for a small fee.

5. ALTRINCHAM

5.1 Background and Vision

Altrincham Forward initiative brings together the town's key stakeholders in a single partnership to drive forward change. The core Altrincham Forward Board, which meets quarterly, is supported by three Task & Finish groups (working under the themes of People, Place and Economy) made up of people with a personal and professional interest in Altrincham and specific expertise to contribute to the project. Local traders, residents, landlords, property developers and community groups plus Altrincham & Sale Chamber of Commerce, Altrincham & Bowdon Civic Society and Transport for Greater Manchester are all represented alongside Trafford Council.

The Altrincham Forward vision for Altrincham town centre is for an attractive, bustling modern market town with a distinct and bold identity. It will offer a balanced mix of retail, leisure, cultural, commercial and social provision to meet both the day to day needs of local people and the aspirations of an affluent and discerning residential sector.

5.2 Business Improvement District (BID)

Following extensive consultation with businesses, the full BID Business Plan was published in mid-September 2015. Canvassing of affected businesses took place between July and November 2015. The Business Plan sets out the budget, projects, governance and rules for the BID, including which businesses

are eligible to pay. Projects include marketing and promotion, parking initiatives, events and joint procurement.

A Baseline and Operating Agreement was drafted which defines the principles and processes for collecting the levy and enforcing the payment of the Levy etc. and sets out the basic services to be provided in the town centre (including street cleaning, emptying bins, graffiti removal, street lighting etc.).

Communications included a BID Website giving access to all the key documents, information and contact details. Banners and posters promoting the BID were produced and vinyl window stickers (“I’m voting yes”) were produced for businesses to display to show their support. A business engagement event took place on the evening of 21st September 2015, led by the BID Steering Group, and included a presentation from the Chief Executive of Chester BID and a Q&A session with members of the Steering Group.

The ballot took place from 9th October to 5th November 2015 and the result was announced on 9th November. Businesses voted to establish a BID with a 68% majority and 74% by rateable value. The turnout was 44% which was above the national average for a BID ballot.

The immediate steps are to form the BID Board and the BID Advisory Group. The Membership will be discussed at the next BID Steering Group meeting in mid-November and an open call will be issued for any required places that need to be filled. Once formed, the Board will appoint a Chair and the BID Company will be registered with Companies House.

The advertisement for a BID Manager will be published in December 2015 with interviews and appointment to take place in January 2016. A bank account will set up in January 2016. Office space will be identified for the BID Company and the lease will run from 1st April 2016, the BID start date. The BID will run until 31st March 2021.

The future role and structure of AF is to be reviewed in light of the BID outcome. This will be a key item of discussion at the next AF Board Meeting on 8th December 2015.

5.3 Public Realm Works/Parking and Access Strategy

The Council completed a Public Realm and Movement Strategy for Altrincham Town Centre in 2013/14 to guide targeted investment in public space in the town centre. The Strategy is focused on providing a better environment for pedestrians and cyclists in order to support the local economy and provide an environment appropriate for a modern market town. The two identified priority public realm projects are:

- Phase One: the route from Shaws Road to Cross Street and Goose Green.
- Phase Two: the section of Stamford New Road (between Altrincham Interchange and Regent Road), Railway Street (between Regent Road and The Downs junction), and Moss Lane (between Stamford New Road and Oakfield Road).

The technical design work required to enable delivery of the first phase of public realm works was prepared in 2014/15.

Goose Green was completed in August creating a new high quality public space surrounded by outdoor eating and drinking space. The Deputy Chief Executive is exploring opportunities for the future use of the space to maximise its potential. A series of meetings with traders has taken place to discuss the traders forming a Federation to work together and manage the space.

The remaining phase 1 Public Realm works were completed in November with the finishing touches being put to Shaws Road, Cross Street, George Street and Stamford New Road. Discussions will take place in late 2015 about the phasing of Phases 2a and 2b which will be linked to the timing of funding becoming available. The proposals also include an Access and Parking Strategy that considers parking facilities and improvements to car park directional signage and pedestrian way finder signage.

5.4 **Great British High Street**

Altrincham was shortlisted for a national Great British High Street award run by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Altrincham was recognised in the 'Town Centres' category alongside Rotherham and Tamworth as 'a vibrant town centre fighting to restore the high street'. Altrincham was up against 230 other High Streets to win a share of a prize pot worth £80,000 and support and training from Google's training taskforce for one hundred shops, bars and restaurants. Judges from DCLG and, main sponsor, the Post Office, visited on 20th October 2015 and were taken on a tour of the town centre. They were very positive about the partnership working and community work being done through Altrincham Forward.

The scoring was split 50/50 between a judge's visit and a public vote which ran for 6 weeks up to 13th November. The vote was well publicized through the town centre and through partner organisations, including press, posters, and social media campaigns.

5.5 **Developments Update**

- **Stamford Quarter** – Phase 1 of the improvement works which includes recladding frontages along George Street and improvements to gateway areas of the Stamford Quarter shopping centre fronting George Street, Cross Street and Stamford New Road is scheduled to start in the New Year. Car park improvement works are underway with bridge works to be completed by 20th November 2015.
- **Clarendon House, Stamford New Road - Conversion to Residential Use**
Work on this landmark site on Stamford New Road to create c42 apartments is due to start in 2016.

- **Old Hospital Site** – In August, City branch held a two-day exhibition of proposals. Feedback will inform the development of the plans before a formal planning application is made. It is proposed that Potts Road will be pedestrianised and replaced by a paved public square. The building will incorporate a new, relocated Altrincham Library as well as a cafe and a pharmacy. It will also incorporate a new community health hub called the Altrincham Health and Wellbeing Centre, providing public health services, enhanced community facilities and GP provision. There are also plans for 100 underground visitor parking spaces.
- **Altair** – Nikal have appointed Eric Wright Construction as the main contractor for phase 1 of the £70m mixed-use leisure and residential scheme. Plans for phase one include the construction of an iconic contemporary building opposite the Tesco superstore. The building will provide 59 one and two bedroom apartments with leisure and retail space on the lower floors. It will link to the new interchange via a public walkway. Integrated into the scheme is a new grand entrance for the ice rink and new landscaped public realm to include outside seating for a new café. Subject to planning, it is hoped that phase 1 will be on site in May 2016 with a 14 month build period.

Further phases of construction are planned for Altair, which will bring additional new homes plus high quality contemporary spaces suitable for bars, restaurants and retail outlets and leisure uses.

5.6 **Fab Lab**

A Fab Lab is a fully equipped fabrication workshop to stimulate the conversion from ideas and concepts into a manufactured prototype or product. The main beneficiaries of a Fab Lab are the local community of all ages who can use the facility for free. Entrepreneurs and businesses are also a key market for a Fab Lab to support product design, prototype development and manufacture. It is also anticipated that schools and colleges will use the facility. There is a national and global network of Fab Labs that Altrincham will become part of.

The ground floor of Clarendon House has been identified as the location for the Fab Lab due to its central position in the town centre, and its adjacency to the new Interchange. The Altrincham Fab Lab will contain the standard tried and tested equipment found in other Fab Labs including: 3D printer, lasercutter, vinyl cutter, milling machines and electronics assembly. It will be opening in January 2016.

A pop-up Fab Lab is to be set up in the Altrincham Forward Offices on November 14th 2015 and December 5th 2015 which will give people the opportunity to try the equipment such as the laser cutter to create personalised Christmas Tree decorations. This is being done so residents and businesses can experience the Fab Lab and to increase interest and attract users when it opens.

5.7 **Communications**

Highlights of recent communications activity has included:

- Social media following has grown on Twitter (total followers up from 2,850 in May 15 to 3,500 by end October 15) and Facebook (total followers up from 943 in May 15 to 1,175).
- The Altrincham BID Website was launched in early September 2015.
- A 'Summertime in Altrincham' leaflet was produced to highlight the wide range of retail and leisure activities taking place over the summer period.
- AF Newsletters were produced in April, June, July/August and November 2015 covering initiatives such as the Festive 50 campaign, Altrincham in Bloom, updates on the public realm works, events, the BID Altrincham Business Learning Exchange (ABLE) and details of the new Pubwatch scheme.
- Links are strong with local media and recent press. Support has been given to the Sale & Altrincham Messenger providing content for their monthly 'Rediscover Altrincham' feature. Print coverage has also included front cover lead stories in the Hale & Altrincham Independent and features in Visit Manchester MCR15 and Business Vision.
- An 'Altrincham Food Trail' leaflet was produced to highlight Altrincham's full food offering to coincide with the Altrincham Festival of Food & Drink. This was distributed during the festival and subsequently from the Tourist Information Centre at Altrincham Library and via local hotels.

5.8 Retail Skills Programme Development

The Economy Group and Retail and Leisure forum identified the need for start-up businesses and retailers to gain training on important aspects of setting up and running a business, to increase the chance of success and provide ongoing mentoring to avoid some of the common business pitfalls.

Work has taken place with Altrincham and Sale Chamber of Commerce and Trafford College to develop a 'Business Academy' for Altrincham, called ABLE (Altrincham Business Learning Exchange) offering free workshop sessions. Sessions are held monthly from September 2015-March 2016.

The launch event was on 23rd June, followed by Legal, Finance and Marketing sessions, hosted at Altrincham Forward. Promotion has been via ASCC database/website, Trafford College and AF website and email to database and town centre loan scheme enquirers, plus a joint PR/social media campaign.

5.9 Business in the Community

A successful application was submitted to the national Business in the Community (BITC) 'Healthy High Streets' initiative which was launched in April 2014 to provide support from multiple businesses who act as High Street Champions over a three year period. The aims of the initiative are to boost footfall, reduce vacancies, create new jobs and return civic pride. Altrincham was one of 33 towns in the first year to successfully apply to be part of the project. An action plan is in place which includes support towards the development of the BID and the proactive involvement of BITC multiple retailer members such as Boots, Marks & Spencer, Santander, the Co-op, EE and Greggs in the work of Altrincham Forward to increase footfall, dwell time and spend. The BITC Team meets quarterly to discuss the Action Plan. The current focus is on the BID and BITC members have been particularly effective at securing support on George Street. The Healthy High Street project leader has

reported that nationally footfall is down -2.46% whereas all the BITC project towns are tracking at least 1% less than this.

5.10 Altrincham Market Update

The Market opened following a refurbishment and investment by the Council. It is going from strength to strength serving over 6,000 people each week. The Market is acting as a catalyst for businesses opening in the nearby Market Quarter and beyond, including some businesses which have been assisted by the Town Centres Loan Scheme. Altrincham Market was awarded the highly coveted accolade of 'Best Market' at the Observer Food Monthly awards in October 2015.

5.11 Employment

To support local businesses and match local people to vacancies, a Jobs Fair took place on 2nd November 2015 at Altrincham Town Hall and was organised in response to the difficulties some local businesses had faced in filling their available roles. This was organised in partnership between Altrincham Forward, Trafford Council, Job Centre Plus, National Careers Service and Trafford College. A variety of full time, part time and seasonal job opportunities were offered and employers offering vacancies included Marks & Spencer, Trafford Council, Domino's Pizza, Stamford Van Hire, Greggs and McGoff & Byrne, alongside many other smaller businesses. The range of available jobs included front line staff, managerial posts and technical vacancies.

5.12 Business Rates

Following discussions with the Valuation Office Business Rates reductions were agreed to take into account both an increase in void levels within the town centre and disturbance from the transport interchange works and will apply up to March 2017. The allowances vary depending upon location including: George Street (10%), Stamford New Road (8%), Cross Street (10%), Railway Street (8%), Shaws Road (pedestrianised (8%), lower Regent Road (8%), Grafton Mall (8%).

Assessments are currently taking place for the 2017 ratings list.

5.13 Business Neighbourhood Plan

Proposals for a Business Neighbourhood Plan are being developed for Altrincham town centre by the Altrincham Business Neighbourhood Forum, a group of community volunteers, chaired by Tony Collier. The plan would seek to define the various uses to which land can be allocated and will influence the policies that will determine the size and design of future buildings and spaces. It will also guide where private and public sector investment takes place. After the different stages of the consultation process, residents and businesses will be given the opportunity to vote for or against the plan. If they vote for it, Trafford Council will adopt the plan and use it as the basis for all their town centre planning decisions from 2015 up until 2030.

Following a Forum meeting on the 9th November 2015 to agree the draft final plan, the final Stage 3 public consultation (also the Regulation 14 statutory

consultation) is due to commence in mid-January 2016 for 6 weeks with publication of the full plan later in 2016.

6. PARTINGTON

6.1 Environmental Works

Following the opening of the Shopping Centre, plans were drawn up about how the £20,000 allocation from the Town Centres Improvement Fund (which has been used to fund environmental improvements/public realm works and the Town Centres Loan Scheme in the other town centres) can be utilised to help improve the centre of Partington. This includes trees, planting, bins and painting benches. The works are partially complete.

6.2 Canalside Residential Scheme

Following the decision by Peel not to draw down funding from the HCA due to viability issues, dialogue is continuing with them to explore options, with partner developers, to bring the development forward.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Significant progress has been achieved within the town centres over the past 12 months and the focus on the town centres is set to continue led by the establishment of a Town Centre team to focus on Sale, Stretford, Urmston and Partington and the Business Improvement District will provide the platform for a sustainable, and business focussed Altrincham town centre.

7.2 The strategic approach is set to continue in the coming months with the development of Movement and Public Realm proposals for Stretford, the delivery of Improvement Plans for Sale and Urmston and the development of a Business Neighbourhood Plan for Altrincham.

APPENDIX 1. APPROVED TOWN CENTRE LOANS

Business	Town Centre	Status
Bell's Fitness - Boxing Gym	Altrincham	Opened Dec 2013
Vintage Angel - Vintage inspired and handmade giftware / Florist (2 businesses)	Altrincham	Opened Sep 2014
Shop4Supplements – Health and Nutritional Supplements	Altrincham	Opened Sep 2014
Angela Quayle Interiors Design	Altrincham	Opened Dec 2014
Velo Espresso – Café with cycling theme	Altrincham	Opened Oct 2014
Baby Bumkins – Children's Wear	Altrincham	Opened Jan 2014
AnTEAque – Antiques and Tea Room	Altrincham	To open end 2015
Old Post Rooms - includes a number of different tenants and a café/tea room. Tenants include: a maternity wear boutique; The Pudding Club; luxury sleepwear and lingerie company, Silk Drawer; former Emporium tenants, Little House Interiors; Plum and Pigeon; Steve Entwistle Photography; The Odd Glass, and, ladies boutique, Madam Butterfly.	Altrincham	Opened Aug 2015
Ombak Furniture	Altrincham	Opened Sep 2015
Runway Pilates	Altrincham	Opened Sep 2015
Fresh to Death – Café (Healthy Foods)	Altrincham	Opened Aug 2015
Cheshire Beauty Sculpt – Beauty Salon	Altrincham	Opened Nov 2015
Idaho – Homeware and Gifts	Altrincham	Opened Sep 2015
Craftsman – Bar	Altrincham	In principle, subject to planning approval.
Luminer – Lighting and Chandeliers	Urmston	Opened Jan 2014
Cheeky Cherubs - Soft Play Area (Social Enterprise / Not for Profit)	Urmston	Opened Jul 2014
Anytime Fitness - Gym	Urmston	Opened Sep 2014
Prairie Schooner – Micro Pub	Urmston	Opened Oct 2014
Suya – Café and Grill	Stretford	Opened Jan 2014
Flexi-minder – Child minding service	Stretford	Opened Aug 2015