

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy	Overview and Scrutiny	3 October 2011

2ND MONITORING OF INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS – TOWN CENTRE VITALITY

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the actions taken following the general endorsement of their recommendations by Executive Cabinet dated 3 June 2010.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- To note the progress on the various actions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

- The report provides a progress note as at September 2011 against each of the recommendations. On the whole, delivery is very positive.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

- To keep Overview and Scrutiny Committee informed.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- None.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Strong Family Support		Education and Jobs	✓
Being Healthy		Pride in Quality Homes and Clean Neighbourhoods	✓
Safe Respectful Communities		Quality Community Services and Spaces	
Vibrant Local Economy	✓	Thriving Town Centre, Local Attractions and Villages	✓
A Council that is a consistently Top Performing Organisation and Delivers Excellent Value for Money			✓

BACKGROUND

- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook an extensive examination of the issues around the vitality and viability of the town centre.

The report containing a number of recommendations was presented to Executive Cabinet in March 2010. Outlined in bold below are the responses by Executive Cabinet to each of the recommendations falling within 8 objectives, along with a progress update for the March 2011 position.

PROGRESS AGAINST RECOMMENDATIONS

8. A further note on progress, as at September 2011, against each of the recommendations within the 8 objectives is contained below.

Objective 1: Formulation of a Comprehensive Marketing Action Plan

9. That the following concepts and ideas put forward by the Task Group be assessed by a Task Group of the Town Centre Forum, with a view to the formulation of a comprehensive Marketing Plan for the Town Centre with the ultimate aim of attracting more shoppers and visitors to the town centre (e.g. through quality and attractive environmental improvements; reasonable car parking fees structure; provision of sufficient restaurants and cafes (operating to accommodate evening shoppers):
- selected coach operators (e.g. Shearings) be reminded of the Markets and other attractions within the town centre and requested to contact the Town Centre and Markets Manager for information on available coach parks;
 - examination of the means of enhancing the localised nature of the Farmers' and other themed markets to improve their distinctiveness by, for example, naming the "Chorley Farmers Market" or linking them to relevant themes (e.g. Cake Fairs, etc) with more effective advance promotion and advertising;
 - the expansion of the present marketing and promotional campaigns and strategy to encompass the whole of the town centre, with the wider distribution of promotional leaflets throughout the town centre;
 - address the currently insufficient co-ordination of town centre promotion and marketing between the Council and High Street and independent traders;
 - accept that the degree of business experienced by town centre traders is to a large extent, dependent on the commodity sold (e.g. shoppers are attracted to Markets on Tuesdays and Fridays; certain shops' business is brisker on Wednesdays, etc), and target future promotions accordingly;
 - promote the wide variety of shops available in the town centre, particularly the number of quality independent retailers, in an attempt to attract both residents who do not normally visit the town centre and other visitors from the surrounding catchment area through the production of a user friendly A4 promotional leaflet and Parish Council newsletter inserts;
 - promotion of the late night opening of shops on Thursday evenings will be reliant on more town centre retailers being persuaded to extend their opening hours;
 - Council's Officers be requested to consider the production of a small single sheet to promote the town centre, which could be used by retailers to accompany goods despatched to customers;
 - Council's Officers be requested to consider the viability and cost implications of advertising the wide diversity of shops and goods available in the town centre on local commercial radio stations, particularly during the period leading up to Christmas;
 - the costs and manpower implications, and likely effectiveness, of producing an occasional Directory of forthcoming cultural and sports events and activities across the Borough as a means of improving the co-ordination, promotion and take-up of the events, be examined.

10. **This set of comprehensive and timely recommendations will feed into developing the 2010/11 Corporate Strategy Project to “Produce a marketing package for the town centre, markets and Chorley as a whole”.**

11. Progress Note

Working with representatives of the Town Centre Forum, a marketing package for the Town Centre, Markets and Chorley as a whole was prepared. The project has delivered:

- Chorley’s Hidden Gems leaflet, distributed via the bus station network, within Northern Life magazine, Buckshaw Village, Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board, and Booths Store
- Stop and Shop in Chorley posters located at Chorley railway station and bus interchange, and 5 bus stops on primary routes
- Christmas radio campaign
- Facebook advertising
- Continuous positive press

12. Progress Note (September 2011)

An opportunity was taken to extend the marketing package using Revitalising Town Centres finance. Further work has included:

- Group travel adverts (5 occasions)
- Stop and shop in Chorley Update (in process)
- Market PA System
- Bunting and power supply for town centre events

Objective 2: Prepare a Strategy for an Evening Economy

13. That a review of the pricing structure and bureaucracy relating to the Lancastrian Room and the publicity/promotions strategy be undertaken, with the aim of making the facilities on offer more affordable and making local and regional groups more aware of the facilities.

14. **A review of the future role and function of the Lancastrian Suite is needed. Reviewing its use as a social facility needs to be undertaken whilst having regard to comparable facilities in comparable locations.**

15. Progress Note

Overview and Scrutiny is currently undertaking a separate review into the future role and function of the Lancastrian Suite.

16. Progress Note (September 2011)

The Overview and Scrutiny review into the Lancastrian is currently on-going, with completion of the review anticipated in December 2011.

Objective 3: Signage Strategy

17. That a recommendation be made to the Lancashire County Council for the erection of brown motorway advertising signs to promote the Markets and other visitor attractions in Chorley.

18. That a review of the directional signage to and within the town centre for motorists and pedestrians be undertaken.

19. That the Task Group supports and commends the need for an adequate and effective number of signs directing visitors to each of the town centre car parks to be placed at strategic locations within and around the town centre.
20. That the Officers undertake a review of the current location of existing gateway signs, with a view to suggesting the location and estimated cost of any required additional signs.
21. That the Officers be requested to liaise with the County Council to examine issues around the current state and security of pedestrian access routes to the town centre, particularly through underpasses and across car parks, and report recommendations to a future meeting of the Task Group.
22. **These recommendations are endorsed. Lancashire County Council will be approached about brown motorway advertising.**
23. Progress Note
Chorley Council has worked closely with officers at Lancashire County Council to design a new brown sign to replace the 'Botany Bay' sign situated at the north side of the M61. All main tourism attractions in Chorley were researched and proposed to the County to be included in the sign. Following discussion around the most appropriate routes from the M61 to these attractions, a final list of these attractions are being recommended on giving us the best chance of getting authorisation from the Highways Agency: Botany Bay, Astley Hall and Historic Markets. An application form is being completed to submit to the Highways Agency.
24. Progress Note (September 2011)
Further to submitting an application form to the Highways Agency for a brown sign at the north side to Junction 8 of the M61, the application has, unfortunately, not been approved for the following reasons:
 - "Chorley" is currently signed on the existing motorway direction signs so attractions in Chorley can be found by initially following these signs.
 - The visitor numbers for Astley Hall and the Markets are not sufficient to justify signs on the motorway.
 - Botany Bay is a retail destination and therefore no longer appropriate to sign as a tourist attraction. (There is no proposal to insist on the removal of the existing signs). In considering the criteria and guidelines for tourist signing on the motorway, there was little cause in appealing this decision. Alternative options are now being considered in terms of providing our tourism attractions.
25. **A key action of delivering the Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy on 'Revealing the Town Centre Signage/Links/Gateways', is preparing a signage strategy which will involve developing a hierarchy of information and signage, introducing a comprehensive and co-ordinated signage palette, and identifying and defining district 'gateways'. This strategy also encompasses issues of pedestrian access including underpasses and car parks.**
26. Progress Note
The signage strategy has been kick-started by focussing on the signage for Astley Hall. New contemporary pedestrian signs have been designed bespoke for Chorley. It is intended that this work will be rolled out across the Town Centre.
27. Progress Note (September 2011)
The new contemporary pedestrian signs have now been installed in Astley Park. These signs have been complemented by a new Town Centre maps located outside Booths on the Flat Iron car park, West Street car park, Fazakerly Street, Covered Market, Fleet Street car park, Portland Street car park, St Mary's car park and opposite WHSmith.

New signage has been provided in the Market Walk Shopping Centre in consultation with Chorley Council. This has included a rationalisation of signage with the removal of the large Market Walk sign opposite the covered market.

Objective 4: Car Parking Strategy

28. That the Council's Officers be requested to examine the possible extension of the scheme currently operated with Booths, under which £1 vouchers were awarded by the Supermarket retailer to shoppers at the store as a discount off parking fees, with appropriate retailers being approached to ascertain if they would be willing to participate in a similar scheme.
29. That the feasibility of the introduction of a herring-bone parking system on Market Street and St George's Street be considered.
30. That needs of disabled drivers be taken into account when any revision of the car parking strategies are considered.
31. **The Town Centre and Markets Manager and Head of Streetscene Services are currently working with representatives from the Chamber of Trade and Town centre traders to look at car parking and extending the car parking voucher scheme off the flat iron car park will be one of the possibilities to be explored. Chorley Council and Lancashire County Council will look into the feasibility of introducing herringbone parking on Market Street and St George Street.**
32. Progress Note
As part of the budget setting process, Members approved a town centre project to develop the night time economy including consideration of free car parking after 4.00pm on the third Thursday night of each month; which was a recommendation from the task and finish group discussions. The pay and display machines on the flat iron car park are now being upgraded and car parking charges have been maintained, absorbing both VAT and inflationary increases.

A detailed layout for herringbone parking on Market Street/St George Street was produced, but as this only generated six additional parking spaces it was not considered cost effective.
33. Progress Note (September 2011)
The new pay and display machines have now been installed on the Flat Iron car park.
34. **The Head of Streetscene Services will ensure that car parking strategies address the needs of the disabled.**
35. Progress Note
The responsible officers will ensure that car parking strategies address the needs of the disabled. Executive Cabinet still maintain free car parking for people with a disability for a maximum of 3 hours in any bay on town centre car parks, provided a valid blue badge is displayed.
36. Progress Note (September 2011)
Position remains the same.

Objective 5: Town Centre Living

37. That residential usage of town centre properties be encouraged by the following means:
 - the Neighbourhoods Directorate be requested to offer an advice service to owners of properties in the town centre that are capable in whole or in part of conversion to flats,

in order to clarify the relevant regulations, directives and standards which require to be complied with;

- the Strategic Housing Services Section be requested to offer assistance in the marketing of new affordable housing units provided by Registered Social Landlords in the town centre, and provide details of applicants on the housing waiting list to the owners of the housing units;
- developers of new schemes in the town centre be encouraged to consider mixed use developments (comprising retail, storage, residential units, etc) whenever practicable.

38. **Encouraging town centre living is integral to our Town Centre Audit and Design Strategy; and these recommendations are accepted in the main. However, Strategic Housing are only able to market new affordable housing units to prospective tenants, details of housing waiting list applicants cannot be passed on due to data protections issues.**

39. Progress Note

Working in partnership with Chorley Community Housing, seven empty flats have been purchased, repaired and fully re-let at Halliwell Street. Furthermore, 'Select Move' on-line Choice Based Letting System has recently commenced which will allow clients to 'bid' for rental properties with housing associations. Support to 'bid' and promotion of properties is available in the One Stop Shop. There is also a facility, via People and Places Directorate, to offer an advice service on regulations for conversion of town centre properties to residential.

40. Progress Note (September 2011)

Position remains the same.

Objective 6: Vacant Property Policy

41. That an Officer be identified to undertake the role of Lead Co-ordinator responsible for the implementation of an Empty Property Policy setting out the practices and procedures to be adopted and implemented in relation to vacant town centre properties, including a package of advice and guidance to prospective developers on relevant planning application procedures, licensing regulations, funding sources and business support services, etc.

42. **Town centre vacant property is marketed on our sites and premises database, and initiatives have been piloted, such as the window dressing, to reduce the impact of vacancies. Whilst our town centre vacancy rates are low, we are mindful of the current difficult economic climate and the impact this may have on the town centre. Working with commercial letting agents, we endorse this recommendation.**

43. Progress Note

The Economic Development Officer now acts as the lead co-ordinator for empty property. A vacant property pack, containing advice and guidance, has been prepared and distributed to commercial letting agents. At January 2011, our town centre vacancy rate was 7.9%, which is well below the North West rate at 18% to 19%.

44. Progress Note (September 2011)

Our Town Centre Grant Packages were launched on 31 May 2011. 'Supporting High Quality Independents into Vacant Shop Premises' provides 100%, shop floor refurbishment grant, up to a maximum of £3,000, as well as a six month 100% business rate subsidy, up to a maximum of £5,925. The 'Shop Front Improvement' Grant is also available to vacant properties on Market Street and Chapel Street. Four vacant units have been brought back

into use to date. Our town centre vacancy rate as at July 2011 was 7.26% and is showing a downward trend.

Objective 7: Develop and Deliver Short and Long Term Plans for the Markets

45. That a short term action plan containing realistic and viable measures aimed at enhancing the appearance and vitality of the Flat Iron Market; achieving maximum occupancy of stalls; and reducing arrears of stall rents be compiled and costed. The action should include practical measures to encourage a uniform charging policy and offer of subsidies or discounts to market traders paying rents by direct debit or in advance, or occupying more than one stall, etc. The plan should also take into account the current economic situation and not impose any undue financial burden that would discourage traders from the market.
46. Several suggested measures that could be explored for possible inclusion in the action plan are itemised in the Task Group's findings report.
47. That the long term seeking to action the following objectives be approved in principle:
 - Replace existing stalls (5m x 5m) with
 - (a) Gazebos stalls (3m x 3m)
 - (b) Umbrella stalls (3.5m x 3m)
 - Examine the introduction of a standard pattern for market stall canopies, with a choice of colours being made available for individual stall holders;
 - Review the markets layout in conjunction with the Flat Iron urban regeneration scheme for integration into the Market Walk Phase II design scheme.
 - Install power points for Flat Iron market stalls.
 - Pursue the provision of new transport (electric) equipment to move market equipment and waste.
48. **Having invested in the new covered market, our attention now turns to the flat iron. These recommendations feed into our 2010/11 Corporate Strategy Project to "Develop a proposal for Improvements to the Flat Iron". The recommendation for short term actions is accepted and should take into account possible revenue generation to fund a long term scheme.**
49. Progress Note
Delivery of the Flat Iron Improvement project is underway for completion in July this year. The introduction of the gazebo type stalls will significantly enhance the look of the market to attract traders, improve the offer and range of goods, as well as attract more customers to the town centre.
50. Progress Note (September 2011)
The new Flat Iron Improvement Scheme was launched in July 2011. After overwhelming demand from traders for the gazebos, the first phase was expanded from 35 stalls to 46 stalls. There has been positive feedback from traders, shoppers and local businesses. With their high visual impact, the look and feel of the flat iron market has been transformed. New traders have already been attracted to the town, and it is hoped that the new scheme will attract more shoppers to Chorley. The delivery of the final phase of gazebos is currently being investigated.

Objective 8: Develop and Deliver a Pavement Café Policy

51. That the Task Group supports and wishes to participate in the production of the projected Pavement Café Policy, which the Members hope will take into account the need to balance the aim of preventing clutter and obstructions in the town centre with the need to protect commercial interests and the vibrancy of the town.
52. **We are currently working with LCC to simplify the application process and also provide Chorley with enforcement powers to ensure that non compliance with the policy can be addressed.**
53. Progress Note
As part of the Public Realm discussions, Chorley Council and Lancashire County Council will be discussing the potential for the delegation of initial enforcement action from Lancashire County Council to Chorley Council. This will not only cover pavement café policy but other obstructions on the highway, when agreed.
54. Progress Note (September 2011)
Discussions are on-going.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

55. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal		No significant implications in this area	✓

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS, PLANNING AND POLICY / HEAD OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

56. Delivery against each of the recommendations is, on the whole, very positive.

LESLEY-ANN FENTON
DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS, PLANNING AND POLICY

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Cath Burns	5305	9 March 2011	Town Centre Vitality