

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Partnerships, Planning and Policy (Introduced by the Executive Leader)	Executive Cabinet	3 June 2010

RESPONSE TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP – TOWN CENTRE VITALITY

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To respond to the findings and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny inquiry report on Town Centre Vitality.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- That the Executive Cabinet endorses the response attached to be received by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

- To inform Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the Executive's response to the recommendations made by the O&S Inquiry on Town Centre Vitality.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- None.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the Central Lancashire sub-region	✓	Develop local solutions to climate change.	
Improving equality of opportunity and life chances		Develop the Character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live	✓
Involving people in their communities		Ensure Chorley Borough Council is a performing organization	✓

BACKGROUND

- In March 2009, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook a "review of the year" event, from which emerged a number of suggestions for topics for scrutiny during the current municipal year. The topic of the town centre was selected as one of the top two issues to be scrutinised during the year and a Task and Finish Group was, accordingly, set up to examine issues around the vitality and viability of the town centre.

7. The Task Group has met on nine occasions since August 2009 to consider carefully the various issues and material considerations related to the following five project areas identified for scrutiny:
- Marketing/Promotional Issues;
 - Markets Issues;
 - Gateways into Town Centre/Signage/Car Parking;
 - Use of Vacant Properties;
 - Improvement of the Cultural Officer.
8. The report containing a number of recommendations was presented to Executive Cabinet in March 2010. Outlined below are the responses to each of the recommendations falling within 8 objectives.

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 (eg 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 (eg 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 (eg 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 (eg 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”.**

Objective 2: Prepare a Strategy for an Evening Economy

11. 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.
12. **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.**

Objective 3: Signage Strategy

13. 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.
14. That a review of the directional signage to and within the town centre for motorists and pedestrians be undertaken.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. **These recommendations are endorsed. Lancashire County Council will be approached about brown motorway advertising.**
19. **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.**

Objective 4: Car Parking Strategy

20. 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.
21. That the feasibility of the introduction of a herring-bone parking system on Market Street and St George’s Street be considered.
22. That needs of disabled drivers be taken into account when any revision of the car parking strategies are considered.

23. **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.**
24. **The Head of Streetscene Services will ensure that car parking strategies address the needs of the disabled.**

Objective 5: Town Centre Living

25. 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.
26. **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.**

Objective 6: Vacant Property Policy

27. 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.
28. **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.**

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

29. 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.

30. Several suggested measures that could be explored for possible inclusion in the action plan are itemised in the Task Group's findings report.
31. 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 powerpoints for Flat Iron market stalls.
 - Pursue the provision of new transport (electric) equipment to move market equipment and waste.
32. **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.**

Objective 8: Develop and Deliver a Pavement Café Policy

33. 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.
34. **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.**
35. The Executive would like to thank the Task Group for their report and recommendations which will help guide the Council in their scrutiny of the Town Centre and ensure that Chorley maintains its position in the retail hierarchy, grows the quality of its offer and provides a distinctive and attractive town centre offer.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

36. 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 TRANSFORMATION

37. The immediate financial implication of this report relate to the marketing of the Town Centre. A sum of £5k has been identified from underspends in 2009/10 and will be recommended for slippage into 2010/11. In respect of many of the other proposals these

are likely to require significant capital investment once the feasibility work is complete. It will then be for members to decide if resources are to be allocated to any programme of work.

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	11 May 2010	Town Centre Vitality