Marple Area Committee

Meeting: 29 January 2020

THRIVING, RELEVANT AND ACCESSIBLE DISTRICT CENTRES

Report of the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report builds on the recent Scrutiny review into the health and prosperity of our District Centres and is seeking early views from Members to shape a future programme of work that will feed into our Local Plan and future delivery of regeneration and investment.

1.2 The report also proposes a number of proposals that could be implemented quickly whilst further engagement takes place over the coming months.

1.3 There is also a high level update in this report on the early work following the announcement that Cheadle has been identified as part of the Government's Town Fund initiative.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Council's commitment to the sustainability and vitality of its District Centres is of fundamental importance to the Borough as a whole and to the Council's ability to address the needs and aspirations of local residents. The Borough's District Centres do, however, face a number of opportunities and challenges which require a new kind of response from the Council.

2.2 Each of our District Centres has its own unique characteristics as well as its own strengths and challenges. The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan emphasises the vibrancy of our District Centres and places the fundamental ambition to forge new partnerships with the places, people, and communities which make up the Borough at the heart of everything the Council does.

2.3 Sustaining and enhancing our District Centres is, therefore, of central importance to the relationship between the Council and the community and is vital to the Council priorities of getting more out of spending, improving citizen experience, and supporting collaborative service delivery; especially in relation to key issues such as the emerging Local Plan, current and future transport investment, schools capacity, meeting our housing need, and creating new place-based service delivery models.

2.4 To respond adequately to the fundamental importance of District Centres, the Council will need to identify and deliver the bespoke place-based interventions that can ensure that each District Centre can fully serve its local residents and the Borough as a whole.

2.5 The overall approach the Council is taking toward its District Centres is set out in this report and has been developed with elected Member oversight through the

AGENDA ITEM

recent joint Communities & Housing and Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny Review into District Centres.

2.6 The eight District Centres as defined through the scrutiny review are:

2.6.1 Bramhall
2.6.2 Cheadle
2.6.3 Cheadle Hulme
2.6.4 Edgeley
2.6.5 Hazel Grove
2.6.6 Marple
2.6.7 Reddish (Houldsworth Square)
2.6.8 Romiley

2.7 The current list is based on the definition of District Centres within the Local Plan and this list will be reviewed as part of the work to produce the new Local Plan. Any new District Centres would be included in this work in the future.

2.8 The proposals set out below will build upon the ongoing work with the Centre for Local Economic Studies (CLES) on community wealth building and help facilitate other existing local workstreams.

3. EVIDENCE-LED INTERVENTIONS

3.1 Understanding the current position in relation to district centres has been an essential starting point for the scrutiny panel.

3.2 To assist in some early baselining the Council has been working in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University's Institute for Place Management (IPM) who are internationally recognised leaders in the field of coordinated, multi-stakeholder approaches to improving places.

3.3 The Council and IPM have together developed an evidence-led approach to identifying the measures, policies, and projects needed to make a tangible difference in each of the District Centres. The first phase if this work was overseen by the joint Communities & Housing and Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny Review into District Centres which endorsed the first phase report on the work attached at Appendix B.

3.4 This work is grounded in the research underpinning the IPM's High Street 2020 work which identified 25 key factors which have been shown to have an impact on how places perform in light of the control and influence the Council can exert. The list of 25 key factors is attached at Appendix A.

3.5 The high-level assessment of the Borough's District Centres included in the first phase IPM report identifies strengths and weaknesses in each of the District Centres and proposes a range of activities that have the ability to make a positive impact on each. This first phase of work will be taken forward through a more detailed analysis of current patterns of activity in District Centres to be provided through data captured by footfall counters currently being installed in each centre.

3.6 The more detailed understanding of how District Centres are performing across different time periods (and in response to different events and initiatives in each area) will inform a more detailed set of objective recommendations from the IPM as an independent organisation on what deliverable interventions each centre could benefit from. The recommendations in this second phase of the IPM's work with the Council will be discussed in detail with Communities & Housing and Economy & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Members before any implementation phase begins.

3.7 The bespoke, place-based proposals devised through this phase of work will have the potential to deliver clear positive benefits.

3.8 The Council and its partners can undertake a broad range of potential interventions which can be mobilised with varying degrees of immediacy and cost. The Council's priority is to determine which interventions are appropriate for each District Centre - and can realistically be delivered - and to demonstrate what the anticipated impact will be.

3.9 This second phase of the IPM's District Centres project will consider the following issues as part of its work to identify appropriate interventions:

- The role of District Centres in the Council's planning policy
- Car Parking provision and strategy
- Provision and quality of green infrastructure
- Cleanliness and environmental quality
- Accessibility
- Requirements of the Council's environmental and place-based enforcement functions
- The quality and sustainability of the retail and leisure offers
- Implications of premises licensing
- The presence and role of anchor institutions (inc. community, civic, and cultural uses)
- Community safety and levels of anti-social behaviour
- Highways investment and wider transport strategy
- Regeneration potential
- Liveability, the potential for greater residential development, and the current offer for existing residents
- Local vision, leadership, and capacity

- Place marketing & branding

- Community events

3.10 It is proposed that the first stage of baselining and follow on work is brought to individual Area Committees during 2020 for further discussion both on the content and also how the future work programme should be shaped.

4. EARLY WINS – TARGETED INVESTMENT SUPPORT

4.1 The Council's traditional approach to District Centre has focussed on supporting their roles in retail and public service delivery and is informed by a District Centres planning policy which applies across all eight. The variety and diversity within our District Centres, however, means that they each function in very different ways and a more flexible response to their unique characteristics will be required in order to support them effectively in light of a changing context for retail and public service provision.

4.2 What is clear however from the early phases of work is that there is an appetite to get started with early initiatives to support the local economy and that we can learn lessons both from other areas and the town centre.

4.3 The proposed scheme is one that is being developed by the Stockport Business Improvement District for the Town Centre (for which a report will follow in January) but its replicability means it's a potential quick win to roll out to district centres as well.

4.4 The Council is therefore proposing the creation of a £200,000 interest-free loan scheme to cover an initial two year period, funded from one-off resources available to the Council, to encourage businesses to occupy vacant premises by contributing towards the financial costs of physical property improvements.

4.5 The Council also proposes that delivery of the physical improvements in District Centres, which this fund will support, will be supported by giving applicants access to a business support team to help them with their business planning and property improvements.

4.6 The proposed principles for eligibility are set out below and will help small businesses get started in the District Centres:

- Applicants must be either Stockport businesses looking to expand in a District Centre, businesses from outside the Borough looking to locate into a District Centre, or entrepreneurs looking to start up a new business in a District Centre

- Eligible applicants will occupy ground floor properties and must complement the offer currently in the wider District Centre

- Applicants must be a tenant or landlord, guarantors will not be accepted

- Applicants must not have any existing debts with the Council

- Applicants must be acquiring a property within the District Centre area.

- Applicants will be required to have a minimum of three years unexpired on any property leases

- Non-eligible businesses will include (but not limited to) payday loan companies, vape shops, betting/gambling shops, charity shops, pawnbrokers, adult shops and temporary shops.

- Businesses must demonstrate they contribute to the success of the District Centre in line with the IPM's first phase report and 25 key factors in the IPM's High Street 2020 work

4.7 By improving buildings and shop fronts in District Centres, this scheme will assist in enhancing the character and street-scene and provide a more attractive environment for the benefit of existing businesses, visitors, residents, and investors. The scheme will also provide an opportunity to assist in encouraging offers and uses that complement the existing District Centre offer(s) as well as creating employment opportunities and, in some cases, additional business rate revenue.

4.8 The proposed loan amounts, term, and repayment criteria are set out below:

- Loans will be available up to a maximum of £10,000 towards property related costs, including frontage improvements, guttering, signage, access improvements, interior refurbishment and decoration, security systems, furniture and display stands

- Overhead costs such as rent, business rates, insurance and staffing costs will be ineligible

- The applicant must fund at least 50% of the total cost of the scheme

- All loans will be interest free although an administration fee of 5% of the overall loan value will be added to the loan

- 50% of the agreed loan approved will be paid on commencement of any works provided all the necessary permissions have been secured e.g. planning permission, regulatory requirements. The remaining 50% paid on completion

Repayments will be monthly over 24 months by Direct Debit

5. EARLY WINS - DEDICATED DISTRICT CENTRE STAFF CAPACITY

5.1 The Council's commitment to vibrant and sustainable District Centres has led to the creation of a number of complementary workstreams as set out above. The complexity of identifying appropriate solutions and delivering tangible improvements in complex multi-stakeholder environments will require dedicated capacity within the Council to coordinate and facilitate the work, provide leadership and accountability, and act as the main point of contact for stakeholders.

5.2 Further staffing capacity is being explored as part of the wider Development and Regeneration team to take this work forward.

6. CHEADLE – TOWN FUND

6.1 On 6 September 2019 the government invited 101 places to develop proposals for a Town Deal, as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund, which could see up to £25m of funding for each of these locations.

6.2 This potential funding isaimed at creating a sustainable future for towns and helping with their growth ambitions. The focus is economic growth linked to Local Industrial Strategies.

6.3 A prospectus for the first stage of the application process was produced on 1st November and in order to access the funding, the towns have to prepare a Town Deal. The timetable is set out below:

- Readiness checklist 19th Dec. 19
- Town Deal Board in place Jan. 2020
- Investment Plan completed by end of summer 2020
- Town Deal agreed – 2020/21

6.4 Further guidance is expected from MHCLG but we will be working to complete our Readiness Checklist, which seeks to establish any current plans which may be in place, by 19th December.

6.5 There will be a considerable amount of work required on this in the coming months and we anticipate reporting back at regular intervals.

6.6 Engagement with local members will take place during December to discuss the emerging proposals and agree a way forward.

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 Area Committee Members are recommended to note and comment on the approach to supporting District Centres set out in this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Not applicable.