

**UPDATE ON CREATING STRONG, VIBRANT AND  
HEALTHY DISTRICT CENTRES**

**Report of the Director of Development and Regeneration**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide an update on how the Council is working with stakeholders to support the development of the borough's eight District Centres and the progress to date in delivering the District Centre Action Plans.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In 2019 the Council established a partnership arrangement with Manchester Metropolitan University's Institute for Place Management (IPM) who are recognised leaders in the field of coordinated, multi-stakeholder approaches to improving places. The focus of their work was to support the Council in creating strong, healthy District Centres.
- 2.2 IPM completed the first phase of their work in 2020 involving high-level assessments of each District Centre along with the installation of footfall counters (1 set in each District Centre).
- 2.3 Following this initial work with IPM it became apparent delivering tangible improvements in complex multi-stakeholder environments would require dedicated capacity. Funding was secured from within existing budgets to support two new District Centre Manager posts. Darren Flannery and Richard Daniels were appointed in January 2022 and each manage 4 centres.
- 2.4 With the removal of all Covid restrictions Phase 2 of the IPM work commenced in February 2022 involving a series of workshops with local stakeholders including local businesses, landowners, community groups, and Ward Members. This work culminated in a detailed report for each District Centre which includes information on how the Centre is performing along with a series of recommendations based on IPM's 4Rs Framework (Restructuring, Rebranding, Repositioning and Reinventing), together with suggested quick wins and longer term priorities. These reports were shared with Ward members in November 2022.

**3. DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING THE ACTION PLANS**

- 3.1 During the Spring of 2022 the District Centre Managers worked with partner organisations and local stakeholders to develop an Action Plan

for each centre based on the recommendations within the IPM reports together with other local intelligence gathered over the previous 12 months. The Action Plans reflect local priorities and include quick wins and longer term actions all of which help towards creating a strong, healthy and sustainable District Centre. The Plans were shared at the Area Committee meetings in March 2023 and as agreed the District Centre Mangers returned to the June committee cycle to provide an update on delivery.

- 3.2 As recommended by the Institute of Place Management partnership is key to developing successful District Centres and to help oversee delivery of the Action Plans and to generate ideas for new projects and activities, along with identifying priority actions, multi-stakeholder groups have, or are in the process of being established in each Centre. There is no one size fits all and membership and frequency of meetings is specific to each Centre based on feedback from stakeholders.
- 3.3 These Visioning/Steering Groups have been instrumental in helping to deliver the Action Plans with passionate stakeholders committed to working collaboratively to create strong, sustainable centres. These strong partnerships are reflected in the successful delivery of a number of the actions within the Action Plans over the last 6 months. Appendix A provides a summary of what has recently been achieved in each District Centre with some significant successes.
- 3.4 The two District Centre Managers have now been in post for 18 months and having dedicated capacity within the Council to coordinate and facilitate, provide leadership and accountability, and act as the main point of contact for stakeholders within each centre is proving beneficial. They work well together and discuss common issues along with sharing best practice across the Centres. This has resulted in projects that have been successfully initiated in one centre acting as a pilot before being introduced in another Centre that is experiencing similar issues. One example of this is the Urban Fronts project which began in Reddish and has now secured Town of Culture Creative Commission funding to enable roll out to Edgeley District Centre.
- 3.5 Across all the Centres the District Centre Managers continue to engage with small businesses and retailers and have been:
  - Supporting businesses and organisations in accessing funding including Warm Spaces, GMCA Green Spaces and UKSPF.
  - Introducing businesses & retailers to the wide range of free business support to help them develop and grow their business e.g. Business Growth Hub, Enterprising You
  - Promoting Library Team's Build a Business Workshops
  - Supporting businesses with their recruitment challenges by promoting support available.

- Signposting to colleagues in the Council who can assist on specialist areas e.g. licensing, Temporary Event Notice, tables & chairs on the highway.
- Dissemination of information on local matters e.g. road closures

**3.6** The Mangers have also been encouraging organisations and businesses to embrace Town of Culture and supporting them with funding applications to ensure range of activities delivered throughout the borough. They also work in close partnership with colleagues from across the Council including the Neighbourhoods Team on delivering many of the projects.

#### **4. BRILLIANT BUSINESSES BOUNCING**

4.1 To help encourage residents to support their local District Centre a new film was launched by One Stockport on the 27<sup>th</sup> September. Featuring a business from each District Centre, the video highlights the importance of continuing to support local shops and businesses. Fronted by Stockport's own Will Mellor the campaign explains that for every £1 spent locally each week by every household it results in £6 million into the local community.

4.2 Many District Centre businesses have got fully behind the campaign and have been happily sharing content across their social channels. They have also downloaded the tool kit and are displaying posters in their windows. This has contributed to over 25,000 views of the video within 5 days of it being launched.

#### **5. DISTRICT CENTRE VACANCY RATES**

5.1 Despite the challenges experienced by those operating businesses on the High Street Stockport is fortunate that all eight District Centres continue to have vacancy rates that are less than the national average (14%). Bramhall, Edgeley, Marple and Romiley all have vacancy rates of less than 6%. Hazel Grove has the highest vacancy rate at 12.3% followed by Reddish at 11.7%. The District Centre managers will continue to build relationships with commercial agents and offer assistance where necessary.

#### **6. BUDGET ALLOCATION**

6.1 Based on the IPM work and feedback via the District Centre Managers, the majority of the recommended actions within the Action Plans involve stakeholders working in partnership to deliver change rather than investment heavy capital works.

6.2 The agreed budget of £40,000 allocated from 2022/23 was split equally between the eight District Centres. Stakeholders in each centre via the Visioning/Steering Groups helped in allocating the £5,000 to projects which were considered a priority and in need of funding within their

Centre. This collective approach to allocating funding has helped ensure a partnership approach to delivery and as is evident by Appendix A, has helped deliver some exciting and innovative projects.

- 6.3 To assist with continuing the successful Action Plan approach for creating strong and healthy District Centres a further £40,000 has been allocated via the Communities and Place strand of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), to be split equally between the eight District Centres. To comply with the requirements of UKSPF all funding must be spent by the end of March 2024 and as with the initial funding local stakeholders are to be involved in agreeing priority projects for allocating the funding to.

## **7. SUPPORT FOR LARGE LOCAL CENTRES**

- 7.1 In addition to the eight District Centres Stockport has a number of large Local Centres that primarily provide for daily shopping needs but generally they have a more limited role than District Centres. Whilst the District Centre Managers do not have the capacity to deliver the same level of support to these centres they have developed a detailed knowledge of the type of support businesses and stakeholders within those centres require to enable them to work collaboratively and help create strong, healthy centres.
- 7.2 To assist those businesses and organisations based in the large local Centres an online portal is to be developed which will have a wealth of useful information to help businesses with accessing business support, running and delivering events including what permissions are required and ideas for running successful activities, how to set up steering groups or traders' associations to help partnership working, and details of funding sources. The portal will also have useful links on how to report concerns to the Council including broken street furniture, overgrown vegetation and problem paving. Whilst the majority of this information already exists its' beneficial to have it all in one place so easily accessible.
- 7.3 The new portal is due to go live in early 2024 and drop in sessions with the District Centre Managers will take place in each of the centres to help guide businesses and organisations through the portal.

## **8. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no additional financial or risk impacts to those identified in section 6.

## **9. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no legal considerations or risks at this time.

## **10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

10.1 No impact on human resource resources.

## **11. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

11.1 A wide range of partners and stakeholders have been involved in the developing and delivering the Actions Plans to ensure all views are considered and are reflected in the Plans.

11.2 It is important the Borough's District Centres serve the needs of the local community and the Action Plans will help towards addressing any current inequalities. We will ensure the partnerships overseeing delivery of the new Action Plans are inclusive and further engagement will be initiated with target groups on specific proposals.

## **12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

12.1 Overall, the environmental impact is expected to be positive as it is expected the combination of the actions in each District Centre will help to enhance each District Centre ensuring more residents use local amenities and services promoting active travel and reducing emissions.

12.2 All applications for the District Centre £40,000 budget will be assessed on environmental impact of the project.

## **13. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

13.1 Over the last 12 months strong partnership working between a range of stakeholders supported by the District Centre Managers, has led to some exciting projects being delivered in each of the eight District Centres. As is the case across all High Streets it's a challenging time for retailers but by working collaboratively it is possible to deliver change and build on the strong sense of community that exists locally.

13.2 The work taking place to help create strong healthy District Centres supports delivery of two important ambitions within the Stockport Council Plan:

Ambition 1: Investment, regeneration and creating jobs

Ambition 3: Wellbeing in Neighbourhoods

13.3 The Committee is requested to note

- a) The progress in delivering actions within the District Centre Action Plans
- b) The additional £40,000 allocated to District Centres from UKSPF to be split equally across the eight Centres
- c) The plans to develop an information portal to support businesses and organisations in large Local Centres.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

### Stockport District Centres Phase 1 Report

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Helen Walters on Tel: 07800 618140 or by email on [helen.walters@stockport.gov.uk](mailto:helen.walters@stockport.gov.uk)