

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

Report of the Assistant 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.

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 of which there are eight in Stockport.
- 2.2 Following the initial high-level assessments of each centre by 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. The two Managers were appointed in January 2022 and they each manage 4 centres.
- 2.3 With the removal of all Covid-19 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 and led to the creation of a District Centre 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.
- 2.4 To help with overseeing the delivery of projects, to generate ideas for new initiatives and activities and to identify priority actions, multi-stakeholder Visioning/Steering Groups have been established for each centre. As there is no 'one size fits all' and with each District Centre having its own set of challenges the membership and frequency of the Visioning/Steering Group meetings is specific to each Centre based on feedback from stakeholders.

3. UPDATE ON PROGRESS

3.1 Since the last update to Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change Scrutiny Committee twelve months ago a number of activities and events have been held in each centre along with significant progress made in delivering a number of key projects in each Centre. Partnership has been key to these successes with different stakeholders working together to bring forward and deliver initiatives. Appendix A provides a summary of what has recently been achieved in each District Centre over the last twelve months.

3.2 In addition to delivering specific Centre based projects and initiatives the District Centre Managers continue to engage regularly with businesses and retailers and make them aware of the support they can access from partner organisations to help them develop, what funding opportunities exist and disseminating information. The support they have provided has included:

- Supporting businesses and organisations in accessing funding including GMCA Green Spaces, Town of Culture creative commissions 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
- Signposting to colleagues in the Council who can assist on specialist areas e.g. licensing, Temporary Event Notice, tables & chairs on the highway.

4. BUDGET ALLOCATION

4.1 Following the initial allocation in 2022/23 of £40,000 split equally between each of the eight District Centres, a further £40,000 was allocated via the Communities and Place strand of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for 2023/24, again split equally. To ensure partnership approach to delivery the Visioning/Steering Groups agreed which priority projects the funding was allocated to and this collective approach to allocating funding has helped to deliver some exciting and innovative projects.

4.2 In July 2024 a further £40,000 was allocated from the 2024/25 Communities and Place strand of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to assist with continuing the successful work that has taken place over the last 2 years. To comply with the requirements of UKSPF the £5,000 per District Centre must be spent by the end of March 2025 which many centres allocating the funding to Autumn and Christmas related activities.

4.3 In addition to the UKSPF funding the District Centre Managers have assisted partner organisations in securing other sources of funding totally over £65,000, this has included grant funding from Charitable organisations, Government funding and sponsorship, all of which is helping towards to creating strong sustainable and viable centres.

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 of 14%. Bramhall, Cheadle Hulme, Edgeley, Marple and Romiley all have vacancy rates of 6% or less. Hazel Grove has the highest at 12%, however, it has reduced over the last 12 months.
- 5.2 The District Centre Managers continue to build relationships with commercial agents and offer assistance where necessary to help attract occupiers to vacant units.

District Centre	Vacancy Rate
Bramhall	1%
Cheadle	7%
Cheadle Hulme	6%
Edgeley	4%
Hazel Grove	12%
Marple	4%
Reddish	12%
Romiley	6%
National Average	14%

Source: Local Data Company – Annual Survey usually takes place in March/April

6. DISTRICT CENTRE FOOTFALL

- 6.1 New footfall counting systems were installed in each district Centre in late March 2023, each Centre now has a single counter which enables us to monitor trends and also allows us to analyse if specific events lead to an increase in footfall.
- 6.2 As the system has been in situ for over 12 months we are now able to compare year on year figures to identify trends and it is really encouraging that all eight Centre have seen an increase in footfall. For the six months from April to September 2024 centres saw a significant increase in footfall compared to the same six months last year, on average centres have seen an increase of between 10% and 30%.

District Centre	% change April to Sept 2024 compared to 2023
Bramhall	30%
Cheadle	5%
Cheadle Hulme	2%
Edgeley	28%
Hazel Grove	16%
Marple	24%
Reddish	58%
Romiley	11%

7. BEST PRACTICE AND SUPPORT FOR LARGE LOCAL CENTRES

- 7.1 As mentioned previously to assist those businesses and organisations based in the large local Centres an online portal is being 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, how to set up steering groups or traders' associations, and details of funding sources.
- 7.2 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 To ensure the portal is a meaningful resource and builds on the work done by the District Centre Managers in the District Centres we will await the outcomes of the current Scrutiny Review into 'District Centre and Local Centres – Best Practice and Building Upon It' before progressing with further work on the portal.

8. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are no additional financial or risk impacts to those identified in section 4.

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 projects to ensure all views are considered.
- 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 projects and initiatives 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.

13. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 Over the last two years 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 links in well with the Thriving Places strand of the Neighbourhood & Prevention work and also 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 projects and initiatives in the District Centres.
- b) The plans to develop an information portal to support businesses and organisations in large Local Centres.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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