

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 1 st May 2019
Report Subject	Town Centre Regeneration
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Interim Cabinet Member for Housing
Report Author	Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been produced in response to three key drivers:

- 1) Continuing challenging economic conditions being faced by town centres in the UK;
- 2) A commitment in the 2018/2019 Council Plan to develop this response;
- 3) Concerns expressed by Scrutiny Committee members over the vitality of Flintshire town centres and the need for the Council to establish a proactive response.

The report summarises the economic challenges currently facing town centres across the UK which are impacting upon their sustainability. The report outlines a series of proposed responses to increase the diversity of uses in towns, to strengthen the role of local stakeholder groups and to support businesses to adapt and compete more effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Members consider and discuss the proposed approach to supporting the regeneration of town centres in Flintshire.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE APPROACH TO TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION
1.01	<p>Nationally, town centres are facing challenging economic circumstances due to changing behaviour by shoppers and the retail industry. The 2018 retail review by Colliers International found that shoppers have gradually been shifting their retail expenditure from local town centres to higher order retail centres, out of town shopping parks, major supermarkets and, increasingly, to the internet. In turn, retail businesses have significantly retrenched into a smaller and smaller number of the most dominant centres.</p> <p>These trends have been accelerated by the financial crisis of 2007/8 with the loss of many high street brand names, but there had been a gradual process taking place over several decades prior to that. In addition, this has been further compounded by the withdrawal of retail banking services from high streets as banks respond to customer preferences for internet and telephone banking options.</p>
1.02	<p>Although Flintshire's town centres have not been immune to this process, the loss of major national chains and the increase in vacant floor space has not been as significant an issue as Flintshire's towns had very few national brands still present and Woolworth's was the only closure of significance. The loss of high street banks has been more significant in several Flintshire towns. This has, in turn, impacted on the scale and vitality of the street markets in the County.</p>
1.03	<p>The approach to town centre regeneration in Flintshire to date has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• commissioning the 2009 health check study to provide baseline for vitality and viability of town centres;• developing long term plans with stakeholders in each town;• investing in frontline service outlets in town centre locations to improve customer access to services and increase foot fall;• supporting local stakeholder projects including heritage initiatives, environmental improvements and local promotion;• guiding and responding to market interest in town centres;• delivering property grants and streetscape enhancements to improve appearance;• providing business support and advice; and• town centre promotion and support for events.
1.04	<p>The Council has invested significant resources in strengthening local community leadership. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• working with Holywell stakeholders on the development of new governance for the leisure centre and on the trial reopening of the High Street to traffic;• supporting Buckley Town Council in developing a long term action plan for the town;• bringing together Flint stakeholders to steer the transformational regeneration of the town and, more recently, to develop their aspirations for the foreshore area;• working with Deeside stakeholders to develop a long term

	<p>aspirational strategy for the area and securing major Welsh Government investment towards its delivery; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting stakeholders in Mold to develop a long term town plan for the town and with establishing a new governance model for managing community green space.
1.05	<p>A more fundamental shift in approach is needed to respond to the challenges facing town centres. Towns in Flintshire have approximately the same number of units as they did in their heyday when the majority of local people spent the majority of their earnings in their closest town. This is not unique to Flintshire; research by the British Property Federation in 2016 found that many towns now have too many shops, especially at the peripheries, and recommends that town centres are restructured around a core area with peripheral areas converted to new uses.</p> <p>The built fabric of town centres needs to change to reflect a new reality where only a small proportion of local earnings are spent in town centres and where roles such as service provision, space for social interaction and living space are becoming increasingly important.</p>
1.06	<p>The delivery of the North Wales Growth Vision, through the initial phase of Growth Deal capital projects and wider programmes of work, has the potential to bring significant benefits to town centres. The overall improvements to the economy will generate additional expenditure for town centres and the inclusive growth work streams will help to reduce concentrations of deprivation. Further, specific projects such as digital infrastructure will help to improve business competitiveness and town centre connectivity.</p>
1.07	<p><u>Proposed strategic approach to town centres</u></p> <p>Resources are now considerably more constrained in terms of Council capital and revenue for regeneration and Welsh Government funding remains very limited. The regeneration team has, as its size has reduced, focussed more on building the capacity of local stakeholder groups to support their towns.</p> <p>The value of this is reinforced by the 2018 report by the Institute of Place Management which recommends that, in managing town centres as places, the process needs to have strong local leadership, excellent communication across stakeholders and a blend of local and expert input, including from young people.</p> <p>As an example, the approach in Holywell on projects including the transfer of the Leisure Centre, the trial depedestrianisation of the High Street and wider town centre projects has built a strengthening partnership between the Council and more confident and aspirational local stakeholder groups. This will be developed further through the development of a broad strategic town plan to focus on service delivery in the town and on reducing the impacts of deprivation.</p> <p>This enabling approach has also been highly successful in the development of alternative models of service delivery and social enterprises across the County.</p>

1.08	<p>Funding from Welsh Government for town centre regeneration remains limited and has, in recent years, been increasingly focussed on property interventions. The Targeted Regeneration Investment programme is currently in its first year of operation and has been prioritised regionally on the most deprived towns for the first three years; Bangor, Colwyn Bay, Rhyl and Wrexham. Limited grant funding through the programme is available for property investment in a wider range of towns (Holywell and Shotton in Flintshire) and the Welsh Government can also offer repayable finance toward property investments in other towns.</p>
1.09	<p>It is proposed that the strategic approach to regenerating town centres in Flintshire includes the work streams below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council will refresh the evidence base using the methodology from the 2009 health check study. This research is underway as part of the preparation of the Flintshire Local Development Plan. 2. Overall, developer interest, especially in retail and office investment, is extremely limited and land availability for development in many town centres is constrained. The Council will respond proactively to market interest in town centre investment and will actively seek to encourage investment wherever there are appropriate opportunities. 3. Continue to support front line service outlets in town centre locations to enable access to Council (and partner) services whilst also helping to sustain footfall. 4. In order to support the physical adaptations needed to help town centres to adapt to the economic climate the Council will facilitate land use change by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approving Local Development Plan policies for town centres that enable land use change to be managed to promote sustainability and vitality; • identifying key sites for future redevelopment with an emphasis on diversifying land use to increase sustainability and vitality; • starting, subject to the availability of capital resources and detailed investigation into commercial viability, to acquire key sites for redevelopment; and • taking advantage of potential investment in transport infrastructure by Welsh Government to identify how wider regeneration benefits can be realised in the immediate vicinity. 5. Town centre stakeholder groups have a vital role to play in encouraging new customers, building local support and new uses for town centres and in guiding service delivery. The Council will support town centre stakeholder groups to develop and implement action plans for their towns and will undertake County-wide actions to support town centres for example through promotional activity. 6. Businesses face mounting competition for limited customer expenditure and need to adapt to new ways of working including greater use of digital technology in order to compete. Weakened business vitality impacts on their ability to invest in their properties

	<p>which can lead to a vicious cycle of town centre decline. The Council will help businesses to adapt to the changing economic climate by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. supporting business networking and shared learning; 2. providing grant or loan funding for property development as resources allow; 3. increasing the availability and affordability of high speed broadband connectivity; and 4. signposting businesses to Welsh Government support programmes especially for digital skills. 5. Support the development of Business Improvement Districts (BID), where viable. BIDs are companies established by the local business community to make investments in their area that improve business trading conditions, attract customers and reduce operating costs. There are now over 300 BIDs in the UK. The feasibility of developing a BID in Mold town centre is currently being investigated.
1.10	In addition, the Council will continue to actively seek external funding opportunities to support the approaches set out in this report. Potential projects will be developed in readiness for future funding streams.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None arising from this report. It is considered that these proposals can be undertaken using existing resources within the team, or via successfully bidding to external funding sources.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Any significant interventions in town centres will include full consultation with local Members, town or community councils and local stakeholder groups.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	No specific risks identified in this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

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7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Business Improvement District (BID) – a business-led organisation tasked with delivering a programme of pre-agreed projects and services funded by investments by the businesses in that location.