

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
DATE: WEDNESDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2012
REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT
SUBJECT: TOWN CENTRE ACTION PLANNING

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To inform Members of the progress made in developing and implementing Town Action Plans (TAPs) across eight towns in the County. These are;

- Buckley
- Connah's Quay
- Flint
- Holywell
- Mold
- Queensferry
- Saltney
- Shotton.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 Nationally, town centre businesses continue to face a very challenging economic environment, in part due to long term changes in shopping patterns, in particular, growing competition from out of town retail parks, supermarkets and internet retailing and in part to the ongoing recession. Flintshire towns have not been exempt from this process but have, in general, suffered less than many comparable areas, with fewer vacant units than the national average and levels of footfall generally remaining stable.

2.02 Flintshire has no single, dominant urban centre. Roles for each of our centres have evolved over time, with some centres having adapted better to changing circumstances. The challenge in Flintshire now is to develop a role for each of our town centres which is achievable and sustainable at a time of severe financial recession in both the public and private sectors. This is the purpose of the TAP programme.

2.03 Town centres in Flintshire have been identified as a strategic priority for the Council in the Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (CL10 – County Town Network Regeneration and Protection) and are highlighted strongly as priorities in both the Community Strategy 2009-

2019 and the Flintshire Regeneration Strategy 2009-2020.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Progress to date

3.01 Flintshire's TAP programme was started in October 2007 when the Council, with support from Welsh Government, commissioned Roger Tym and Partners to undertake a detailed health check of the seven main towns in the County; that is; Buckley, Connah's Quay, Flint, Holywell, Mold, Queensferry and Shotton.

The purpose of the study was to provide a point in time assessment of the vitality and viability of each town centre. It included a comparable set of data for each centre, providing benchmarks against which the impact of future regeneration initiatives could be measured and assessed. The study was intended to also help to focus future activity in the towns.

3.02 Following detailed research and consultation in each town. The consultants reported back in July 2008, they concluded that:

1. a strong stance should be taken in resisting further out of centre retail and leisure developments, in order to protect the traditional centres;
2. all the towns needed some level of intervention if they were to maintain or improve their vitality and viability;
3. in the short-term, vitality and viability will be best protected through marketing and business liaison-based measures;

3.03 The Executive agreed on 16 September 2008 to establish the Town Action Plan (TAP) programme. It was agreed that partnerships should be formed to lead the regeneration process in each town and that Town Action Plans should be produced to steer and co-ordinate activity.

3.04 Since then, the progress has been as follows:

- March 2009 – June 2009
Stakeholder workshops were held in each town, attended by over 200 people in total, to identify priorities and suggested actions.
- November 2008 – June 2011
Implemented nearly two hundred 'early win' projects across the towns, including environmental improvements, promotion, business support and supporting events. Examples include:
 - a) support for Mold Food and Drink Festival and Mold Spring Clean;

- b) the successful relaunch of Flint market;
- c) the summer events programme in Holywell;
- d) greening the main approach to Queensferry;
- e) extending the Buckley Heritage Trail.

The total value of the programme was approximately £800,000 over the three financial years, of which £400,000 has come from external sources.

- April 2009 – September 2009
Partnerships have been established in each town, led by a representative of the business community where possible.
- February 2009 – August 2010
Provided tailored business support to High Street retailers through the Shop Doctor programme. Sixty businesses attended workshops or received one to one support.
- June 2010 – July 2012
Developing the long term Town Action Plans “Masterplans” for each town.

The process has achieved considerable momentum with only minimal expenditure. This has laid good foundations for future activity and will ensure that future capital resources are used strategically through the preparation of medium/long term strategies.

- 3.05 The Town Action Plan programme has been well received by businesses and partners in the towns and has received very positive coverage in the media. The programme won the Action for Market Towns Wales award for partnership and strategic working in 2011.

Future actions

- 3.06 The approach in each town will vary, dependent upon the perimeter needs of the town, the opportunities presented, the priorities of the local partnership and the ability to deliver. However, the approach will include activities under three work streams:
1. encouraging investment into the town centres through assembling sites for development, promoting to investors and incentivising existing owners and occupiers to improve their properties;
 2. Improving the appearance and functionality of the town centres to increase their appeal to customers, visitors and investors;
 3. encouraging new users into the town centres through diversifying the range of uses, supporting business improvement, promotion and supporting a wider programme of events.

- 3.07 The TAP process complements the wider approach to the visitor economy being taken by the Council. There will be benefits to visitors and local people generated by the regeneration of the town centres and by their more integrated management. This approach to managing the key destinations in Flintshire is being promoted across North Wales and the TAP programme has put Flintshire well ahead in this process.
- 3.08 The TAP process also brings together and complements other Council programmes which are currently underway:
- Flintshire Connects – the development of one-stop shop facilities in many of the town centres will help to attract customers.
 - Streetscene – the new integrated structure for Streetscene services will help to manage town centres more effectively by creating a more integrated and responsive approach to managing and maintaining the street environment.
 - Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) – the TAP programme will be able to build upon the major physical improvements funded through the THI which is helping to bring important historic buildings back into use in Flint and Holywell;
 - Events – this is a useful way to bring life and vitality back into town centres and the Council has been able to support a wide range of events over the last five years. Major successes include support for the Mold Food and Drink Festival, the Holywell Well Inn Festival, and the Flint Festival.
- 3.09 The TAPs for most of the towns in Flintshire have now been produced although further, more detailed, work is needed to develop clear delivery strategies. This process is set out in Appendix 1 for each of the eight towns.
- 3.10 Many of the town partnerships have been in existence for three years or more and the Council is reviewing the structure of a number of them to reflect changing circumstances and the aspirations of the partners themselves. Mold, for example, has established a more formal structure to drive forward their action plan. In the Deeside towns the Enterprise Zone provides a scale of opportunity not considered when the TAP process was begun. The Council will work with the partnerships in Deeside to review partnership structures and governance arrangements to maximise the benefits to the area.
- 3.11 The Council has also been working to secure additional external funding, primarily from Europe, to support the Town Action Plan process. Executive approved a bid on 16 February 2010 to the Rural Development Plan for Wales to support regeneration activity in key visitor destinations in the county, which includes the two rural towns, Mold and Holywell, the bid was approved by Welsh Government in March 2011. This provides £110,000 each to Mold and Holywell to

contribute to streetscape improvements and will also offer small scale building improvement grants to improve the visual appeal of the towns. The project is underway currently.

- 3.12 Executive also approved a bid on 30 March 2010 to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to secure funding for town centre regeneration. This bid was submitted in December 2010 and was finally approved by Welsh Government in February 2012. The ERDF project now provides £1.3m for streetscape improvements in Flintshire town centres as well as £1m (shared with Wrexham) to provide grants to High Street property owners to bring vacant units back into employment use. Projects have been developed within the Town Action Plans and these are now being considered for ERDF funding.
- 3.13 In addition, Council capital funding is being used to match fund the ERDF programme and will also directly fund a range of projects across the County as well. Executive delegated the allocation of Town Action Plan funding to the Flintshire Regeneration Partnership, advised by the partnerships in each town, to ensure projects complement the wider strategic position and offer the best value for money.
- 3.14 The Council has recently adopted the Action for Market Towns benchmarking process to monitor the health of town centres which will allow the key indicators for each town to be compared against participating small towns across the UK.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That members note the progress in developing and implementing Town Action Plans across Flintshire.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 The Council allocates £200,000 annually from the capital programme to contribute to the regeneration of town centres. This is used primarily to lever in matching funds from European and private sector sources.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 Town centres play a key role in providing accessible goods and services for those most vulnerable.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 The TAPs will seek to meet a range of economic, social and environmental concerns. Transport and accessibility will also be key elements within the plans.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 The TAPs will seek to help local service centres remain viable. These centres provide vital locally based services, especially to those without access to private transport.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

None

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 Consultation with stakeholders is undertaken in each town for each project undertaken. The ongoing consultation with partnerships also helps to maintain good communication between stakeholders.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Considerable consultation has been undertaken in each town throughout the process so far, with two rounds of workshops held in most towns and more detailed consultation on the various masterplans as they have been developed.

12.00 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Town summaries

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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